

Survey Respondents Suggest that Some Academic Library Professionals without a Graduate Degree in Librarianship Have Prior Library Experience and Do Not Plan to Pursue a Library Degree

Oliver, A., & Prosser, E. (2018). Academic librarianship without the degree: Examining the characteristics and motivations of academic library professionals. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 44(5), 613-619.

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Evidence Summary

Survey Respondents Suggest that Some Academic Library Professionals without a Graduate Degree in Librarianship Have Prior Library Experience and Do Not Plan to Pursue a Library Degree

A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To examine the motivations and career paths of professionals outside the field of library science who work in academic library settings, including their reasons for not pursuing a graduate degree in librarianship.

Design – Multiple-choice survey questionnaire.

Setting – Not clearly stated.

Subjects – 193 adults without graduate degrees in librarianship employed in professional positions in academic libraries.

Methods – A nineteen-item multiple-choice questionnaire hosted on Select Survey and a previous study by the same authors. Filtering excluded survey respondents who did not currently work in academic libraries, who had graduate degrees in librarianship, or who do not identify as an academic library professional.

Main Results – Most of the survey respondents (n=115, 59.9%) had positions in a library prior to pursuing a professional academic library career. Of those with prior library experience, most (n=98, 85.2%) had gained experience in academic library settings. The two top reasons cited for becoming an academic library professional were an interest in employment in academic library settings (n=59, 52.2%) and meeting position requirements (n=54, 47.8%). A fifth of respondents both met the requirements for their position and had an interest in working in academic libraries (n=23, 20.4%). Most respondents had less than five years' experience (n=41, 36.6%) or six to ten years' experience (n=43, 38.4%) in an academic library. Less than half of respondents had become academic library professionals after applying as an external candidate (n=83, 44.6%) and a number of respondents had applied as an internal candidate (n=52, 28%). Several respondents had become academic library professionals because they were promoted, appointed, or recruited within their academic libraries (n=35, 18.8%). Few respondents were actively working on a graduate librarianship degree (n=21, 11.3%) and most expressed that they did not need such a degree (n=112, 67.9%). Those who were pursuing a graduate degree in librarianship did so because of their desire to advance their careers (n=17, 81%). Respondents' current positions were mostly categorized in areas such as administration (n=77, 31.2%), scholarly communications (n=34, 13.8%), technical services (n=27, 10.9%), and information technology (n=20, 8.1%).

Conclusion – Having prior experience working in an academic library served as a notable motivating factor for entry into the position of academic library professional. Two main pathways towards obtaining such positions included positions without graduate library degree requirements and the transition of paraprofessionals into professional-level jobs. Most survey respondents noted their lack of interest in pursuing an advanced degree in librarianship, as they did not see the significance of having one. These findings may help library education programs to better

understand growing needs in librarian education and prepare the future library workforce to meet these new demands.

Commentary

Previous literature (Gremmels, 2013; Simpson, 2013; Zhu, 2012) about library professionals without graduate library degrees has tended to highlight non-MLS or paraprofessional job responsibilities and staffing trends among a wide range of libraries. This research article builds upon a prior study by the authors (Oliver & Prosser, 2017) and remedies a gap in the literature by examining the motivations of individuals pursuing specific positions within academic libraries that do not require a library graduate degree. The authors, however, do not provide a clear purpose or motivation for conducting such a study, which raises concerns regarding the study's significance.

This study was appraised using the "EBL Critical Appraisal Checklist" (Glynn, 2006). While the methodology was appropriate for the research question and target population, the authors did not detail how they recruited and selected study participants were recruited or whether informed consent was obtained. Other methodological details missing from the study included the exact geographic locations of study participants, data collection methods, and the precise time frame during which the surveys were conducted. Given the number of omitted details, replication of this study would be difficult. Due to the number of survey respondents (193 of 233), the authors state that they were able to obtain a fairly reliable set of responses with a 7.2% margin of error with a 95% confidence interval. However, the authors cite a 2016 ACRL population statistic that there are at least 6,900 academic library professionals in ACRL libraries, which raises concerns that this study is not representative of a larger population and that the results are overstated. It was unclear whether the content of the instrument was validated by an expert panel or pilot tested to ensure the survey would truly assess what the authors wanted to measure, which may have some potential to impact the accuracy of the survey's responses. Additionally, survey respondents were able to

select multiple answers for some questions, which caused some of the response totals to exceed 100%.

The results of this study may be inflated and may not represent a large portion of the demographic. However, there may be implications for individuals seeking careers in academic libraries, potential graduate students choosing between library programs, library hiring committees, professional associations, and the educational standards and curricula of accredited library programs. As new trends in academic libraries develop and emerge, skill sets and knowledge not addressed in traditional library education programs may be leading to new roles that do not require advanced degrees. This raises important questions regarding how graduate library programs might need to adapt in order to prepare students for future interdisciplinary roles and to justify the financial investment students make in pursuing advanced professional degrees. Though responses to the survey indicate that there may be an increasing number of new professional positions within academic libraries that do not require a graduate degree in librarianship, the small response rate indicates that there is a need for more rigorous research in this area.

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