This is a post-print copy of a published article available at:

Why We Do What We Do: Exploring Priorities within Public Services Librarianship

Corey M. Johnson
Instructional Design Librarian
Washington State University
PO Box 645610
Pullman, WA 99164-5610
509.335.8628
coreyj@wsu.edu

Elizabeth Blakesley Lindsay
Assistant Dean, Public Services and Outreach
Former Head, Library Instruction
Washington State University
PO Box 645610
Pullman, WA 99164-5610
509.335.7735
elindsay@wsu.edu
Why We Do What We Do: Exploring Priorities within Public Services Librarianship

Abstract

Public services librarians perform an increasingly diverse set of duties, and this study explores which job components are most important to librarians. The researchers surveyed public services librarians at ARL libraries to gather data on both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence how public services librarians spend their time. The study examines librarian opinions about job aspects that are most personally satisfying, and issues related to tenure and librarian education. The results show a disconnect between what librarians view as important to users and what is important for achieving tenure. The year of graduation also appears as a key factor in perceptions and practices, including a perceived lack of library school training for instruction work.

Introduction

Public services librarians manage diverse professional roles, and often find their roles expanding. A host of emerging and changing areas of librarianship contribute to this job role proliferation. The increasing influence of the information literacy movement is likely to further amplify the list of responsibilities, as are other developments such as the increased use of computer technology in libraries, the design and maintenance of institutional repositories, smaller library staffs in academic libraries and the task of providing organization to the current explosive growth in information. In addition, libraries are beginning to face formidable competition from commercial information providers; users have options and they increasingly demand comprehensive sets of information delivered quickly. The “do more with less” path that so many academic
libraries are now on just gets narrower and narrower. It is now more important than ever that public services librarians continue developing and examining their priorities; a sustainable and vibrant future depends on it.

This study highlights both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence how public services librarians spend their time. The survey collected information from public services librarians at ARL libraries. The researchers utilized the respondents’ type of institution, years of experience as an academic librarian, and years worked at their current institution as data to find connections to job components librarians find the most personally satisfying, the most challenging, and which they feel have the greatest overall impact on library users. The investigators also studied job components and their relation to those outlined in librarian job descriptions, asking respondents which components they feel are most important to their library administration, as well as those they feel are most important in terms of achieving tenure, when applicable. Finally, this study examines librarian education, both in terms of formal graduate study and in-service training, drawing correlations between the central emphasis of these educational experiences and the current slate of job components.

**Literature Review**

Any study of the job satisfaction or duties of librarians has to address the faculty status issue. Debate and discussion surrounding the issue of status for librarians in academia has only increased in recent years. Blaise Cronin, dean of Indiana University - Bloomington’s School of Library and Information Science, fueled the flames in 2001 with his *Library Journal* essay against faculty status,¹ and the responses and continued discussions have persisted.² Whichever side of the debate one finds oneself siding with,
the issue remains that any job satisfaction survey conducted of academic librarians, unless careful vetting is done to exclude one group or the other, will result in responses from those who are tenured or aspiring to it, those who work under a permanent status resembling tenure, and those who work as staff, under various contractual arrangements with their universities.

A number of studies have been conducted on job satisfaction, although many of these tend to be regional studies that include various types of librarians. One example of a study of academic librarians across the United States was published in 1993. In this study, Bonnie Horenstein surveyed librarians in 300 libraries, asking questions about their status, requirements for tenure, amount of teaching done and meetings attended, the decision making structure of the library, and participation in professional organizations. Horenstein also asked respondents about how connected they felt to their organizations, and how much control they had over their daily activities, then she had them rate their satisfaction levels with a number of issues, including salary, benefits, management, and working conditions. Horenstein found that librarians with faculty status are more satisfied with their work, more involved, more in control of their jobs, more informed and more connected to their institutions and to the profession. This study confirmed the earlier findings of Marjorie A. Benedict, who had discovered that the majority of librarians she surveyed preferred working in systems with tenure and rank, even if they currently were not in such systems. Michael Koenig, Ronald Morrison and Linda Roberts also explored the link between satisfaction and faculty status, looking specifically at the impact on research library directors. These researchers also found a positive relationship between job satisfaction and faculty status.
Even though many researchers correlated greater job satisfaction with faculty status, several studies do so with caveats. The Association for College and Research Libraries recently (2001) revised their “Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Libraries.” The standards call for nine conditions for faculty status, including ability to participate in library and university governance, eligibility for promotion, leaves, and professional development funding, and the ability to “exercise independent judgment” in the performance of one’s professional duties. Danielle Bodero Hoggan, in her exploration of faculty status for librarians in higher education, concluded that the beneficial association between better job satisfaction and faculty status occurs when faculty status is implemented by ACRL standards. Shannon Cary’s work contributes the finding that librarians are very often “not on equal footing” with their [faculty] teaching counterparts concerning salary, benefits and promotion structure. These three of the nine ACRL standards are often not met, calling into question the strength of the tie between faculty status and job satisfaction. Beyond the job satisfaction issue, Kingma and McCombs also raise doubts about librarian faculty status saying such a structure unduly costs academic institutions and may decrease productivity for librarians.

An ever expanding set of job duties for public services librarians and the amount of experience a public services librarian has also affect job satisfaction. Johann van Reenen surveyed his own co-workers and compared their job satisfaction to the results of several other studies, making comparisons with other industries in the U.S. and also with librarians in other countries. Reenen concluded that library workers are far less likely than U.S. workers in general to say they have the opportunity every day to do what they
do best. He suggests an explanation for this trend explaining “… most librarians [are] still having to juggle their new responsibilities with their existing one[s], leading to excessively long hours and job descriptions that could easily accommodate two, or even three, full-time people.”14 A study by Christen Cardina and Donald Wicks shows that the total number of components within jobs has increased for public services librarians in the past ten years and that this trend “could overwhelm some and not allow for expertise.”15 Reenen also found that more experienced workers are more satisfied than those with less experience, and those lacking supervisory responsibilities had the lowest satisfaction while department heads were the most satisfied. Cardina and Wicks posit that an increase in supervisory roles may be a key to job satisfaction for librarians.

This study supplements the current literature by examining job components and satisfaction in greater depth. Instead of asking the general question about overall job satisfaction, this study asks public services librarians to select basic components within their jobs that they find most and least satisfying. Examining job component areas is important because as the set of duties for public services librarians continues to increase, prioritization among job duties will become more essential. In addition to job satisfaction, this research also explores new ground by addressing job duties that are most and least challenging, have the most and least impact on library users and are most and least important in terms of perceived administrator expectations and job descriptions. Connections between job components and graduate school/in-service education are also explored. Cardina and Wicks call for further research concerning the relationship between faculty status and job satisfaction, and this study addresses that issue. Finally, unlike many of the prior studies in this area, this study reaches a broader range and larger
number of subjects and is not tied to a particular region, interest group or library department.

**Methodology**

This study consisted of surveying public services librarians from Association of Research Libraries (ARL) academic libraries across the United States. ARL is the central organization for tier one research libraries in the U.S. and Canada. We considered a more expansive survey population including libraries beyond those in ARL but determined we did not have adequate resources and wanted to focus on specifically on academic librarianship. We selected the ARL survey population intending to discover trends based on graduation year from library school, years of service as an academic librarian, variations in institution size (based on student population) and public or private status for current schools of employment. The researchers visited member sites, accessed online directories of librarians, and assembled a list of email addresses based on job titles and/or departmental names. We concluded the search with 1510 addresses for potential participants. During a two week period in March 2004, we sent email messages to our survey pool. The message was comprised of an invitation to complete our online survey. We had 328 librarians complete our survey, a response rate of 22%. It turned out that 50% of the survey respondents were from tenure track institutions and 50% were not. Survey results were stored in an SQL database.

The online survey instrument included 25 questions soliciting general employment and career development information and inquiring about intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence how public services librarians prioritize their time (see Appendix). The data analysis plan focused first on examining the response frequencies
from all 25 questions. Secondly, we assessed relationships between respondent
demographic information and answers to the job prioritization questions. Third, we
examined the relationship between prioritization of various job duties and which of those
job components respondents find most personally satisfying, the most challenging (in a
positive sense), and which they feel have the greatest overall impact on their users. We
also investigated day-to-day emphasis on job components and their relation to those
outlined in librarian job descriptions, those felt to be most important to library
administration, and those seen as most important in terms of achieving tenure, when
applicable. Finally, we explored librarian education, both in terms of formal graduate
study and in-service training, drawing correlations between the central emphasis of these
educational experiences and the librarian’s current slate of job components. Chi-square
($\chi^2$) results are reported to indicate where associations between variables are statistically
significant.

**Results**

A basic breakdown of the demographic and professional work characteristics of
the survey respondents provided key foundational information for interpreting the survey
results. For a snapshot of the results, see Table 1 (insert table 1). Of the respondents,
74% (242) were from public universities, 26% (85) were from private institutions.
Concerning the year the participants graduated from library school, 23% (75) received
their MLS before 1980, 34% (112) between 1980 and 1994, and 43% (139) in 1995 or
later. The librarians were asked to indicate the number of years they had worked as
academic librarians. Twelve percent (39) had been an academic librarian for less than 2
years, with 29% (96) at 2-5 years, 17% (54) at 6-10 years, and 49% (158) having been an
academic librarian for 10 or more years. Therefore, about 50% have worked as academic librarians for fewer than 10 years, while the other half have worked as academic librarians 10 or more years. The last introductory question queried respondents about the number of years they had worked at their current institutions. Twenty percent (64) had been at their current institutions for less than 2 years, 29% (96) working 2-5 years, 14% (47) working 6-10 years, and 37% (119) working more than 10 years. These statistics collapse into the general trend that about 50% have been employed at their current institutions 5 or fewer years and the other 50% 6 or more years.

The next question asked for respondents to identify a percentage of their total time that is spent in six different areas. These six areas, shown in Table 2, were created to give a relatively simple, yet comprehensive structure for exploring key areas of public services work (insert Table 2). Unfortunately, an error in coding for writing results to the database prohibited us from getting accurate information for this question. The question did serve an invaluable purpose however, as it provided participants with descriptions of the six job component categories utilized in all of the subsequent survey questions (see Table 2 for these descriptions).

The next two questions asked the participants to indicate the main job area for which they felt library school prepared them the most and the least. Overall, the participants selected reference as the job area for which they were the most well trained (81%, 259), with collection development a distant second (11%, 36). None of the other four job components garnered more than three percent. With the exception of reference (1%, 3), the other five job component areas received similar levels of agreement concerning areas for which library school least prepared them. Teaching received the
most support at 28% (90), followed by publishing at 21% (68), management at 19% (61), committee work at 17% (55), and collection development at 14% (45). Even though overall librarians said reference is the main focus at library schools, more recent graduates are more likely to say management is the least emphasized job component compared to all others ($\chi^2=6.1117$, with 2 df, $p=0.0471$).

The most and least personally satisfying job components were addressed in the next two questions. Overall, 50% (160) of the librarian respondents indicated that reference activities were the most satisfying component of their jobs. Teaching was selected as most satisfying at about half the rate (24%, 76), with collection development at 17% (55). None of the other three job component areas, management, publishing or committee work, received more than 4%. Librarians who graduated later are most satisfied with teaching and committee work at higher rates and less likely to be most satisfied with collection development and management than their colleagues who graduated earlier ($\chi^2=31.8041$, with 15 df, $p=0.0068$). In addition, librarians who had more years of experience as academic librarians were more likely to say collection development is the most satisfying part of their job than librarians with less years of experience at their current institution ($\chi^2=35.8092$, with 15 df, $p=0.0019$). In regards to the least satisfying component of their jobs, librarians selected committee work at 44% (139), management at 19% (60), publishing at 17% (55), collection development at 13% (41), teaching at 5% (16), and reference at 2% (7).

Following the topic of job satisfaction were questions asking librarians to choose which job components they feel are the most and least important to their central library administrator or administrative body. There was not strong concurrence in either area.
Twenty-five percent (79) of the librarians designated reference most important to their administrators. Then there was a middle grouping of four job component areas; teaching at 19% (59), collection development at 17% (53), committee work at 16% (59), and management at 15% (47). Publishing trailed the rest at 9% (30). Librarians specified publishing most frequently as the least important job component to their administrators (32%, 103), followed by reference (18%, 56), management (17%, 53), collection development (14%, 44), committee work (11%, 36), and teaching (8%, 25). Librarians who graduated later feel their library administrators focus less on collection development and management, and more on teaching and reference ($\chi^2=33.3487$, with 15 df, $p=0.0042$). Librarians who have worked longer as academic librarians are more likely to think their library administrations stress committee work and management ($\chi^2=44.7784$, with 15 df, $p<0.001$).

There is also a relationship between working in a private or public institution and perception of what library administrators emphasize most. Librarians from public institutions are more likely to say their administrators emphasize publishing, teaching and committee work the most, while librarians from private institutions are more likely to think their administrators emphasize collection development and management the most ($\chi^2=12.3841$, with 5 df, $p=0.0299$). It is interesting to note that this relationship is the only trend in the entire study that illustrates significant differences concerning the thoughts of public versus private school librarians.

The next two questions asked about the job components they feel have the most and least impact on their users. Forty-one percent (131) selected reference as having the most impact, with 27% (88) choosing teaching and 27% (86) opting for collection development.
development. Librarians who graduated later are more likely to say teaching has the most impact on users and less likely to say management has the most impact on users ($\chi^2 = 41.0062$, with 15 df, $p=0.0003$). Librarians who have worked longer as academic librarians are more likely to think that management activities have the most impact on users ($\chi^2 = 27.0318$, with 15 df, $p=0.0285$). In respect to the areas with least impact on their users, librarians said publishing (49%, 155) and committee work (41%, 129). Management was a distant third with 8% (25).

We next investigated the relationship between what librarians see as important in terms of job satisfaction and impact on users and what they think their administrators see as important. For the job component areas reference, collection development, teaching, and especially management, there is a solid connection between what individual librarians find most satisfying about their jobs and what he/she thinks is most important to his/her administrators ($\chi^2 = 79.4063$ df, $p<0.001$). Concerning the job component areas reference, collection development, teaching, and management, there is a solid connection between what individual librarians find has the most impact on their users and what he/she thinks is most important to his/her administrators ($\chi^2 = 92.9155$, with 25 df, $p<0.001$).

Even though the chi-squared tests show a tendency for a connection between job satisfaction/impact on users and important job components to administrators, the overall frequencies temper this alignment. Public services librarians declared that reference and instruction were the two most satisfying areas of work, with 50% and 24% of respondents, respectively. These two areas were also seen as having the most impact on users, with 41% for reference and 27% for instruction. However, only 25% named
reference as most important to the administration, with 19% naming instruction as most important. If administrators do see reference and instruction as important to public services, it appears that in many cases this particular message may not be completely reaching the line librarians.

The respondents were invited to select the job areas they find most and least challenging. Teaching was chosen as the most challenging area most often (24%, 76), followed by publishing (18%, 59), collection development (18%, 58), management (18%, 57), reference (14%, 46), and committee work (8%, 24). Librarians who have worked longer as academic librarians are more likely to think management is the most challenging job component in public services librarianship. Concerning both reference and collection development, the librarians with the least and most experience (less than 2 years and more than 10 years) see both of these job components as the most challenging at higher rates than their peers with 2-10 years of experience ($\chi^2=23.5052$, with 15 df, $p=0.0740$). Committee work was chosen as the least challenging area most often (46%, 144), followed at a distance by collection development (19%, 60), reference (13%, 41), publishing (8%, 24), teaching (7%, 23), and management (6%, 20).

We considered whether people who have worked longer/shorter as academic librarians or graduated earlier/later from library school think differently about teaching as the most challenging. While librarians with less than two years, 2-5 years and 6-10 years of experience as an academic librarians all report teaching as being the most challenging component of their jobs at about the same level, there is a sizable drop concerning the number of librarians with 10 or more years experience reporting teaching as the most challenging aspect of their jobs ($\chi^2=23.5052$, with 15 df, $p=0.0740$).
Job prioritization in the area of in-service training was explored. Respondents were asked which of the six job component areas they attended the most and least amount of in-service in the last year. Forty-eight percent (142) of the librarians designated reference as the category area for which they had the most in-service training in the last year, 21% (61) said teaching, 14% (40) management, 11% (32) collection development, 4% (11) committee work, and 2% (7) publishing. Thirty-one percent (90) specified publishing as the category area for which they had the least in-service training in the last year, 20% (57) said management, 19% (54) committee work, 14% (41) collection development, 9% (27) teaching, 7% (20) reference.

We wondered if librarians are selecting in-service opportunities that match what they find most challenging. From the frequencies results, nearly 1 in 2 librarians reported attending the most in-service on reference related issues in the last year. At the same time, librarians were not likely to report that reference was a challenging part of their jobs. In fact, of the six job component areas, reference work finished next to last concerning job components librarians found the most challenging. It is also interesting to note that publishing is viewed as the most challenging job component at the second highest rate and least frequently as the least challenging job component, and yet only 2% reported attending publishing-based in-service the most in the last year. Either in-service events that focus on scholarly writing are rare, or librarians are just not choosing to attend them. Our job as librarians is to teach people how to do research, yet we rarely let ourselves be instructed about research issues. Even given these trends, there is a still an overall connection between the job components librarians see as most challenging and the choices they make for attending in-service events ($\chi^2=23.5052$, with 15 df, p=0.0049).
Despite the fact that fewer people do in-service outside of reference-oriented events, those that do pick in-service activities that match job components they find most challenging.

We explored parallels between in-service opportunity selection and what librarians say has the most impact on their users and what they think is most important to their administrators. We predicted the job components librarians view as having the most impact on their users would also be the job components most frequently addressed in the in-service opportunities they select. There are strong relationships concerning reference, teaching and management. For example, librarians who believe reference work has the biggest impact on users were also most likely to attend reference based in-service at the expense of the five other job component areas ($\chi^2 = 44.7653$, with 25 df, $p=0.0089$). We forecast the job components librarians view as having the least impact on their users would also be the job components least frequently addressed in the in-service opportunities they select. There are strong relationships concerning publishing, committee work and management. For example, librarians who believe publishing has the least impact on users were also least likely to attend publishing based in-service ($\chi^2 = 40.4158$, with 25 df, $p=0.0264$).

There is a strong correlation between the job components librarians think their administrators stress most and the components which form the subject matter for in-service opportunities selected. Reference, management and teaching show the strongest correlations. For example, librarians who think their administrators emphasize reference work most report attending more reference centered in-service opportunities ($\chi^2 = 58.0642$, with 25 df, $p=0.0002$).
The next two questions asked the participants to predict which of the six job components they would be spending the most and least amount of time doing in five years. The librarians said they would be spending the most time on reference (31%, 96), followed by collection development (21%, 67), teaching (19%, 61), management (16%, 49), committee work (8%, 26), and publishing (4%, 14). The trend was for librarians who graduated later to be more likely to think that teaching and committee work will take the most time in five years. They are also less likely than their counterparts who graduated earlier to think collection development will be what they do the most in five years ($\chi^2=39.5957$, with 15 df, $p=0.0005$). The librarians said they would be spending the least time on publishing (35%, 110), followed by management (22%, 69), collection development (14%, 44), committee work (11%, 33), reference (10%, 31), and teaching (9%, 27).

Respondents were asked “Does your current job description dictate the relative emphasis you should give to each of the main areas of your job?” Of the participants, 49% (157) indicated “yes,” while 51% (166) marked “no.” The librarians answering in the affirmative were asked to address two follow up questions inquiring which job areas were the most and least stressed in their job descriptions. Forty-nine percent (73) of these librarians selected reference as the most emphasized job component, 16% (24) said collection development, 14% (20) teaching, 14% (20) management, 4% (6) committee work, and 3% (5) publishing. Thirty-three percent (49) chose publishing as the least emphasized job component, 31% (46) said management, 12% (18) committee work, 10% (15) teaching, 8% (12) collection development, and 5% (8) reference.
In the pursuit of further discovery, we considered whether working with a job description that specifies the employees’ job components and their relative weights of emphasis has an impact on the librarians’ perceptions of their job components as compared to librarians without such job descriptions. Publishing was the only job component area that showed a significant relationship between the variables. Librarians with such job descriptions are more likely to say publishing is the most challenging part of their jobs than all other job components ($\chi^2 = 3.4425$, with 1 df, $p=0.0635$), and more likely to say publishing is the most important to their administrators than all other job components ($\chi^2 = 2.9527$, with 1 df, $p=0.0857$). Librarians with emphasis-defined job descriptions are also less likely to say that publishing is the least important job component to their administrators than librarians without such job descriptions ($\chi^2 = 2.8529$, with 1 df, $p=0.0912$), and more likely to say management activities are least important to their administrators than librarians without such job descriptions ($\chi^2 = 7.0481$, with 1 df, $p=0.0079$). It is clear that librarians working under emphasis defined job descriptions are also people who have publishing responsibilities. Since publishing is not an area librarians gravitate toward in terms of job satisfaction and high positive impact on users, it must be important for these librarians to have a specifically delineated emphasis on publishing in their job descriptions. It also aids the libraries and these institutions as a whole because both want their librarians to succeed in terms of achieving tenure.

When focusing on the librarians who have written job descriptions dictating emphasis to particular job components, 49% (73) say reference is the most emphasized job component on the description. Collection development comes in a distant second to
reference with 16% (24) indicating that collection development is the most emphasized job component on their job descriptions. Librarians with job descriptions also say that reference is the job component their administrators emphasize most at 28% (43) with collection development a distant second at 17% (26). Given these trends, it is not surprising that there are a large number of people who both said reference was the most emphasized on their job description and most emphasized by their administrators. It is important to note that this trend goes beyond just reference to include all six job component categories ($\chi^2 = 164.9913$, with 25 df, $p<0.0001$). For example, all five people who reported publishing as the most important job duty on their job description indicated that this was the duty they felt was most important to their administrators. One exception to this trend is the result that fully 26% of librarians with job descriptions reported that reference was the most emphasized job component on their job descriptions while stating that another job component was most important to their administrators.

Finally, the librarians were faced with a set a questions regarding tenure. They were first asked whether or not their institution had a tenure system for librarians. Of the participants, 50% (155) indicated “yes,” while 50% (157) marked “no.” The librarians currently working at an institution with a librarian tenure system were then asked to address the question of which job components are the most and least important in terms of getting tenure. Seventy-seven percent (117) of these librarians selected publishing as the most important job component in regard to tenure, with all five other job areas each accounting for less than 10% of the total. Opinions about the job component least stressed for tenure were much more evenly split. Thirty-one percent (47) chose management as the least emphasized job component, 25% (37) said reference, 17% (26)
collections, 16% (24) committee work, 7% (11) teaching, and 4% (6) publishing. Librarians who graduated later think that reference work is less important and publishing is more important in terms of getting tenure ($\chi^2 = 34.9244$, with 15 df, $p=0.0025$).

How does working under a tenure system affect librarians’ perceptions of their job components as compared to librarians in non-tenure systems? It is not surprising that publishing is often at the center of measurable trends. Librarians in a tenure system report that library school prepared them least for publishing more often than librarians working outside a tenure system ($\chi^2 = 5.9070$, with 5 df, $p=0.0151$). Librarians working under tenure systems are more likely to report that publishing is the most challenging component of their jobs and less likely to say teaching or reference are the most challenging component of their jobs ($\chi^2 = 12.5688$, with 5 df, $p=0.0278$). Tenure track librarians are more likely to think their administrators stress publishing and committee work most and are less likely to think their administrators stress reference work most ($\chi^2 = 18.6773$, with 5 df, $p=0.0022$). In regards to librarians working under a tenure system and with job descriptions outlining the relative emphasis of job components, these librarians say committee work and management are stressed least on their job descriptions and less likely to say collection development and publishing are stressed least ($\chi^2 = 20.0225$, with 5 df, $p=0.0012$). Even though 73% of librarians with job descriptions stated that publishing was the most important job component in terms of getting tenure, only 9% of these people indicated that publishing was given the most weight in their job descriptions.

**Discussion/Conclusions**
There are three areas of concern with the results of this study. First, opinions of what principal set of characteristics defines a public services librarian vary widely. In generating a list of potential respondents, we found some difficulty in ascertaining whether or not a library employee is a public services librarian. Some institutions provided department names and job titles while others offered one, the other, or neither. The following words helped guide our selection of appropriate survey recipients: reference, outreach, instruction, public services, and user services. We did not create a random survey pool as we offered the survey opportunity to all public services librarians we could find. At any one institution we surveyed, it is possible that some public services librarians who were not clearly identified as such may not have received the survey.

Second, the survey instrument was problematic for some respondents. In the comments section, many participants noted difficulty in answering our questions about tenure because they were not sure exactly what we defined as a tenure system. Many ARL institutions have hybrid tenure systems with contrasting promotion and job security structures. Articles such as Charles B. Lowry’s “The Status of Faculty Status for Academic Librarians: A Twenty-year Perspective” outline some of these hybrid systems. Participants cited tenure equivalents, referring to them as “career status,” “continuing status,” “academic status” and “security status.” Participants were also unable to answer clearly because at some institutions individual librarians can choose whether or not they want to pursue tenure while at others the tenure option has been available to librarians during some periods of time and unavailable at other times.
Third, many participants also found it difficult to classify their duties into our division of six public services work categories (see Appendix). They mentioned that we needed an additional outreach/liaison category. We did not include such a category because we felt these activities could always be couched in the context of one of our six categories whether reference, collections, publishing, teaching or committee activities. Many respondents lobbied for a technology work category as well. We felt we had covered this area by including “maintaining print and electronic resources” under collections activities and “creation of in-class and online curriculum” under teaching activities. It is clearly a challenging task to compile a simple yet comprehensive list of job categories for public services librarians.

Even given these weaknesses, many important conclusions were drawn. This study indicates that, for the most part, librarians feel they are in tune with their library administrators. Librarians generally report that their administrators emphasize the same job areas that the librarians feel are the most satisfying area of their jobs and that have the most impact on their users. In addition, librarians with less experience and who tend to do more teaching are more likely to say their administrators prioritize teaching.

Librarians with more experience as academic librarians are more likely to say collection development and management are the most satisfying job components while also indicating that their administrators stress these two areas most. This study also shows that there is a link between in-service opportunities librarians select and the job areas they think their administrators favor, and between job components stressed in job descriptions and what librarians think their administrators’ emphasize. Tenure track librarians are more likely than librarians working without such a system to think their administrators
stress publishing. It is interesting to note that this level of cohesion concerning job component emphasis between librarians and their administrators exists even while only 49% of the surveyed librarians have job descriptions which dictate relative emphasis to job components. Many library managers are clearly communicating priorities to their subordinates outside the written structure of job descriptions.

Beyond librarians’ thoughts about their administrations, there are also interesting trends concerning library management in general and its connection with librarian education. Prior studies have shown that librarians in management positions have higher job satisfaction than those who do not. In this study, however, management work ranks a distant fourth in terms of which of the six job components are most satisfying. In addition, it is a relatively indisputable structural reality that the way to move up the salary and prestige hierarchy in academic libraries is to climb into managerial positions. It is ironic then that the survey respondents reported that management was the job component least likely to be the most emphasized in library school training. Further, it was the least experienced librarians that most substantiated this trend. It seems that library schools would benefit from an expanded focus on management skills. Also, librarians predicted that they would focus on management least in five years at a rate higher than four of the other five job component areas. It does not seem librarians are planning advancement to managerial positions. Current librarian mentors could especially enhance a new librarian’s professional development by nurturing his or her management skills.

Many recent articles have expounded on the changes in LIS education that occurred in the late 1990’s as a result of the Kellogg-ALISE Information Professions and Education Renewal Project (KALIPER) and the ALA’s Congress for Professional
Education (COPE). One area of the LIS curriculum that has changed over time is instruction. The number of courses available has grown, although they vary widely in content, and only one program (the University of Washington) requires an instruction course. Given that Beverly P. Lynch and Kimberly Robles Smith found that all academic reference librarian position advertisements posted during the 1990s included instruction duties, this is an important gap in education in the field. The fact that bibliographic instruction, user education and/or library instruction were not covered extensively, if at all, in library schools prior to the 1990s was also documented by the ACRL Instruction Section’s survey, which showed that while only four programs offered a course in instruction in 1976, the number of programs offering such a course had grown to 26 by 1998.

Our survey confirms the findings of these studies. Of our survey respondents, only 3% named instruction as the area that library school most prepared them for in their jobs. Instruction topped the list of areas named as those which library school least prepared them for, with 28% of respondents. When this data is broken down by graduation year, however, the responses mirror the trends in the shift toward offering or even requiring courses in library instruction or information literacy in the LIS programs. Of the 3% of respondents who said they were most prepared for teaching, 70% of that group graduated in 1995 or later. Of the 28% who said they were least prepared for teaching, 89% of them graduated prior to 1995. It is also interesting to note in contrast to this trend that the most experienced librarians (10 or more years of experience) are also those least likely to view teaching as the most challenging part of their jobs. This could be because these librarians just do less teaching or perhaps classroom experience is an
effective tool for becoming comfortable with classroom teaching. While some would argue that graduate library education is not intended for skill development, it is clear that library schools could enhance the preparation of their students with more concentration on teaching. In addition, experienced instruction librarians should make a particular point to mentor new librarians concerning classroom instruction.

This study highlights some important differences between librarians who are at different stages in their careers. More experienced librarians appreciate collection development and management more while newer librarians favor teaching and committee work. More seasoned librarians are more likely to be most satisfied with collection development, more likely to think they will be concentrating on this aspect of their jobs the most in five years and librarians with ten or more years of experience are more apt to report it as most challenging. It is not surprising that more experienced librarians see greater relevance concerning management activities as they are more likely to be managers. Newer librarians are more satisfied with teaching and believe it has a greater impact on users. They are also more likely to see teaching as the job component they stress most in five years in comparison to the other five job categories. Both newer and more experienced librarians tend to be more satisfied with job areas they also find challenging, which is certainly a positive finding.

The indication that less experienced librarians see committee work as more relevant and meaningful is quite intriguing. Even though committee work was relegated to least satisfying and least challenging job component overall, newer librarians are more likely to be most satisfied with committee work, more prone to think their administrators stress it the most and more apt to say they will be focusing on committee work most in
five years. There are many probable reasons for this trend. Less experienced librarians join committees to learn more about their libraries and larger institutions, and to generally get involved. They are also likely engaged in committee work to please their supervisors or for tenure purposes. Although our results did not show significant differences between what newer and more experienced librarians think about the emphasis of committee work during library school, we suspect that more recent graduates have done more course work in teams than their colleagues graduating earlier. All of these trends highlighting differing skills and work orientations based on years of experience and year of library school graduation should be noted by library managers. They can assist managers in decisions about assignment of duties, coverage of library services and hiring.

Publishing is key to librarians working in systems with a tenure requirement, yet little is done to prepare beginning librarians. Librarians working under a tenure system report publishing as the most challenging aspect of their jobs. However, it ranked second of the job components emphasized least in library school and was the highest ranked job component in relation to what job component area was stressed least in recent in-service training. It is clear that library schools need to step up their orientation to academic publishing and individual library systems need to increase in-service offerings that directly focus on all aspects of successful written scholarship including: knowing where/how to publish, how to structure a research study, how to do statistical analysis, and how to interpret reviews.

Of the librarians working in a tenure system or similar system, 77% said publishing was the most important factor for achieving tenure, far outweighing other areas of the job, including reference, collections or teaching. On the other hand, only 3%
of these respondents view publishing as most satisfying and less than one percent view it as having the most impact on users. In addition, only 9% felt it was most important to their library administrators. Although librarians’ views and their perceptions of their administrators’ viewed meshed well overall, there is a notable disconnect between personal satisfaction, service impact on users, what librarians think matters to their administrators, and what is required of them for tenure. What is worse, this divide only seems to be widening as librarians with less experience and more recent graduate dates are more likely than their seasoned colleagues to think publishing is the most important factor in achieving tenure. Academic librarianship is at a crossroads. While prior studies have shown that librarian faculty status provides many benefits including overall higher job satisfaction, publishing, the main means to achieving tenure, is at odds with other job components librarians view as most personally satisfying, important to library users and important to their administrators. As the information world expands in volume and complexity, and librarian roles do the same, librarians will need to decide how and if publishing activities can be successfully balanced with other job components arguably more central to a library’s mission.

Finally, this study suggests many new avenues of inquiry. We plan to create a similar survey specifically for administrators to gauge their thoughts on key issues and to also see how they perceive the attitudes of those who work for them. Given that the data indicated that more experienced librarians stress different job components than their less experienced colleagues, we also intend to discover if these divergences tend to serve as a positive way to divide an ever expanding workload for public services units or if they create a negative sense of divisiveness among librarians. The future of public services
librarianship looks bright as new and diverse job roles hold the potential to reinvigorate the existing sets of job components. These changes should challenge us to examine our priorities as we continue to seek the most effective ways to serve our users.

Endnotes


5 Ibid, p. 264.


9 Ibid.


20 Meulemans and Brown, p. 257.