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## Employment Opportunities for Academic Librarians in the 1970s: An Analysis of the Past Decade

*This study analyzed academic library position vacancies advertised in Library Journal during the period 1970-79 in the categories of position type, position level, and geographical location. The past decade was characterized by fluctuating levels of advertised job opportunities. Those opportunities presently are entering a period of marked decline, indicating diminished employment prospects for academic librarians in the future.*

A FREQUENT LAMENT in academic librarianship today centers on the perceived decrease in the availability of job openings in the field. Factors such as increased numbers of individuals entering the field of librarianship, austere library budgets, declining student enrollments, reduced job mobility, and vagaries of the national economy seemingly have operated to constrict the job market, resulting in fewer openings and decreased employment opportunities for academic librarians at all levels.

However, the basic validity of this premise remains untested. How pervasive is this predicament? Are academic librarians' pessimistic perceptions of this situation accurate? Have employment opportunities actually declined over the past decade? What is the current state of the job market? Answers to these questions are of vital interest to academic librarians and are the focus of this study.

### THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1967, the American Library Association stated that the shortage of librarians had reached "crisis proportions." To combat

the shortage, ALA announced the implementation of steps to: (1) increase recruiting for graduate library science programs; (2) push lobbying for increased aid for library science programs; and (3) encourage job redesign. This program worked so well that by 1970, in combination with a slowdown in the nation's economy, an oversupply of librarians existed and the job market became tight.<sup>1</sup>

Scattered reports surfaced during the 1970s about librarians experiencing problems in securing employment. In its 1970 annual report on placement and salaries for new library science graduates, *Library Journal* noted that "for the first time in the [nineteen-year] history of this series, we can observe a marked reduction in the number of openings available to the beginning librarian," thereby signalling that the disparity between supply and demand, which had characterized librarianship for two decades, had narrowed significantly.<sup>2</sup> An ALA survey conducted the following year confirmed that declining employment prospects were in the offing as libraries reported budget cuts, hiring freezes, and even reductions in hiring.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of the decade, librarianship was being rated as one of the ten worst professions for potential employment. This situation was compounded by a general de-

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cline in higher education nationwide. Pessimistic employment projections were accompanied by frustration generated by employers who increasingly demanded experience yet were reluctant to offer chances to acquire the necessary experience.<sup>4</sup>

#### METHODOLOGY

Determining a workable test sample and procedure for this project presented a number of problems. It was decided that a decade-long perspective would best be gained by analyzing position openings advertised in library-related periodicals. This perspective probably would provide a representative overview of the situation.

Nationally circulated library publications such as *American Libraries*, *College & Research Library News*, and *Library Journal* regularly list position openings. *Library Journal* (*LJ*) was eventually chosen for three major reasons. First, it had been in existence since 1876 and was well established as an advertising medium by 1970. Second, its wide circulation made it appealing to potential advertisers. And third, *LJ*'s greater frequency of publication (twenty-two times per year as opposed to eleven for *American Libraries* and eleven for *College & Research Library News*) encouraged larger numbers of position advertisements. A random check revealed that *LJ* included more academic library advertisements overall. Consideration was initially given to utilizing all three periodicals. However, an attempt to compile statistics from advertisements appearing in all three proved to be an unmanageable and unnecessary task, and it was abandoned.

Two methods of data collection were employed on a trial basis to ascertain which best suited the total project. Photocopying each page of advertisements, clipping them apart, and then comparing to eliminate duplication was the first option.<sup>5</sup> While this method guaranteed near-perfect accuracy, it was time-consuming, costly, and wasteful. The second option, which ultimately was adopted, involved sight perusal of advertisements. This procedure involved some backtracking, cross-checking, and occasional photocopying of advertisements to ensure that each position was counted only once. These steps were crucial to the study's

validity and were adhered to scrupulously. A check of this method revealed that it was not only simpler and faster, but equally as accurate as the clipping method tested.

Assigning each advertised position vacancy an appropriate designation of type and level was relatively simple since advertisements normally stated this information in exact terms. The geographical determination of listings was axiomatic, and required no interpretation. Where multiple duties were listed, the first library position/function given was used to determine the position designation. Only library vacancies in the United States were included. Canadian, overseas, and library science teaching positions were excluded. Only full-time positions were recorded, including temporary positions if the contract period ran at least nine months.

#### FINDINGS

A total of 2,531 academic library job openings were advertised in *LJ* during the decade 1970-79. Of that number, 1,237 (or 49 percent) were classified as public service positions, 897 (or 35 percent) as technical service, and 397 (or 16 percent) as administrative (table 1). Administrative classifications pertained only to library directors or assistant directors. Administrative classification within other positions will be described in a later section on position levels.

It was evident from yearly totals that a cyclical pattern of position availability plagued academic librarians throughout the decade (figure 1). The strong level of job openings that launched the decade gave way to two years (1971 and 1972) of declining prospects, which bottomed out in the latter year. A substantial upswing in advertisements occurred in 1973, followed by a modest gain in 1974, a plateau in 1975, and another significant increase to the decade's high point in 1976. A sharp decline took place during the years 1977-79, a drop that shows no signs of abating as the 1980s get under way.

The falling level of advertised positions, and the decreased opportunities for professional employment inherent in that decline, was exacerbated by the fact that the total number of academic librarians increased over the last decade. Their numbers grew

TABLE 1  
TYPE AND NUMBER OF POSITIONS ADVERTISED, 1970-79

Type of Position	Number of Positions by Year										
	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	
<b>Public Services</b>											
Archives/special collections	(60)	3	2	4	6	9	9	6	10	7	4
Audiovisual	(105)	7	7	4	7	21	21	12	10	9	7
Bibliographer	(85)	0	7	4	17	12	12	14	8	6	5
Bibliographic instruction	(13)	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	5	4	2
Branch/departamental	(125)	10	7	12	12	15	12	19	19	14	5
Circulation	(72)	11	3	6	7	8	8	9	7	7	6
Government publications	(38)	9	0	1	0	3	3	4	6	7	5
Public services	(178)	29	18	14	8	18	13	23	18	20	17
Reference	(561)	44	36	32	52	51	60	92	80	65	49
<b>Technical Services</b>											
Acquisitions	(126)	27	16	4	15	12	10	12	12	14	4
Cataloging	(544)	71	45	43	52	56	43	66	59	63	46
Serials/periodicals	(73)	10	6	2	14	7	7	4	11	7	5
Technical services	(154)	15	6	16	11	13	18	20	17	23	15
Administrative (all)	(397)	27	19	25	27	45	55	72	55	42	30
Totals	(2,531)	263	172	167	229	270	271	354	317	288	200

from about 20,000 in 1970 to an estimated 26,500 in 1980, a 32 percent increase, which contributed to the constricted job market.<sup>6</sup> This point is especially noteworthy since the number of positions advertised in 1970 (263) exceeded by one-third the number advertised in 1979 (200).

Most position types advertised followed the overall cyclical pattern already described, particularly those in the public service category. Technical service positions displayed some resistance to the extremes of the general pattern, although this category actually fared worse than the other two since the number of technical service positions advertised in 1970 (123) was never equaled during the ensuing decade. Advertisements for reference (561) and cataloging (544) positions far exceeded those in any other category. Taken in the aggregate, they accounted for 44 percent of all positions advertised.

Analysis of position levels indicated in the advertisements provided insight into the job market for academic librarians over the past ten years. It should be acknowledged that advertisements in a national publication such as *LJ* possibly might include fewer beginning or assistant positions. These would likely be filled utilizing less expensive

approaches, such as mailings to graduate library science schools or telephone job lines. No attempt was made to categorize positions pegged with a beginning-level designation since that descriptor was infrequent. All non-head-level positions were tabulated in the assistant category, even though qualifications for those positions varied.

Little consistency was maintained in position levels for the public and technical service advertisements. The ratio of head to assistant positions fluctuated broadly throughout the decade (table 2). The number of head and assistant positions operated independently of any extraneous variables such as the total number of positions advertised in a given year. The years 1971 and 1976 illustrate this point well. In 1971, total positions advertised (172) approached the decade low (167), reached the following year. Also during 1971, the percentage of head positions advertised reached a decade low, and the percentage of assistant positions a decade high (22:78). Five years later, in 1976, these respective percentages rose to similar levels (30:70) after several years of fluctuation, even though 1976 boasted the decade's high of 356 positions advertised.

For the administrative category, the head

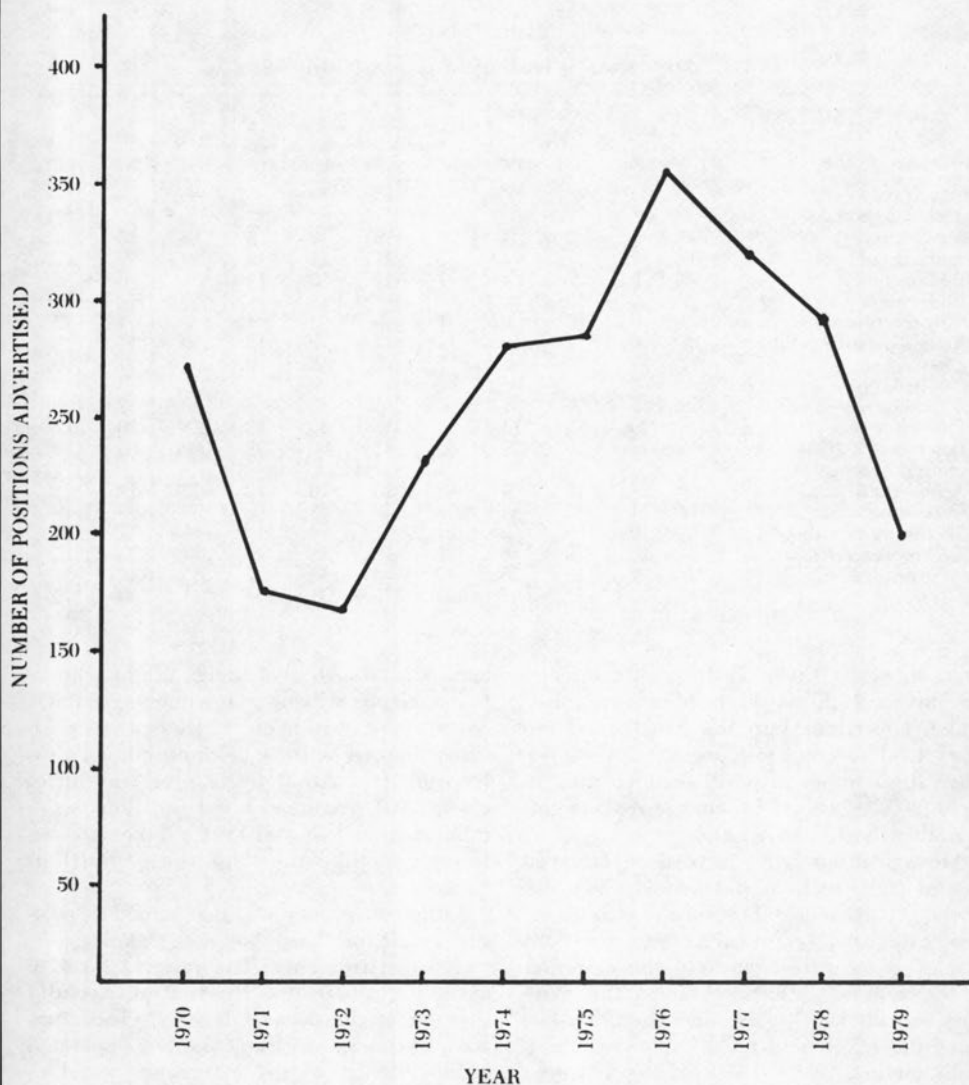


Fig. 1  
Total Number of Positions Advertised, 1970-79

to assistant ratio averaged 60:40, nearly a reversal of that found for the public and technical service categories, 33:67. The larger percentage of head positions is due partly to the fact that not all academic libraries fund an assistant director position. The larger percentage of head positions in this category does not indicate any signif-

icant opportunity for upward mobility because of lateral job moves or because of the small segment (16 percent) of all positions advertised that the administrative category comprises (table 3).

The final area of investigation involved the geographical distribution of positions advertised. In order to provide a basis for



geographical comparisons and analysis, the regional breakdowns made by the ALA Committee on Accreditation of graduate library schools programs were utilized.

For the total number of positions advertised over the sample period, the regional distribution paralleled the distribution of academic librarians employed in each region in 1970 (table 4). While it seems reasonable that a variable like the number of academic librarians employed in a region would influence the number of positions advertised, this ten-year perspective indicates a stronger relationship than might be expected. Except for some variance in the northeastern and midwestern regions, the number of positions advertised either closely approached or equaled the regional distribution of all academic librarians. This fact, as well as future regional population shifts that would further affect position availability, are important considerations for

those seeking employment in a given state or region.

#### CONCLUSIONS

After a decade of fluctuation in the marketplace, job opportunities for academic librarians are falling to critically low levels, perhaps permanently. Few new positions will be created. Nearly all position vacancies will be replacement positions.<sup>7</sup> The 1980s will likely be characterized by limited upward mobility, as advancement will be feasible not through growth and expansion but rather through retirements or deaths. Individuals striving to advance from assistant to head positions, or those attempting to break into academic librarianship, will increasingly be thwarted in their attempts by declining job opportunities and reduced mobility at all levels.

Admittedly, this is a grim prospect. Nevertheless, it is essential for today's

TABLE 2  
POSITION LEVELS (HEAD: ASSISTANT) IN PUBLIC AND TECHNICAL SERVICES CATEGORIES, 1970-79

Type of Position	Year									
	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Public services	21:95	11:69	21:56	56:54	50:87	43:95	55:125	44:119	39:100	26:74
Technical services	50:73	23:50	30:35	41:51	37:51	24:54	30:72	31:68	41:66	33:37
Total both categories	71:168	34:119	51:91	97:105	87:138	67:149	85:197	75:187	80:166	59:111
Breakdown by percentage	30:70	22:78	36:64	48:52	39:61	31:69	30:70	29:71	33:67	35:65

TABLE 3  
POSITION LEVELS (HEAD: ASSISTANT) IN ADMINISTRATIVE CATEGORY, 1970-79

Type of Position	Year									
	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Administrative	19:8	16:3	19:6	15:12	37:8	40:15	60:12	46:9	33:9	24:6
Breakdown by percentage	70:30	84:16	76:24	56:44	82:18	73:27	83:17	84:16	79:21	80:20

TABLE 4  
REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF ACADEMIC LIBRARY JOB OPENINGS, 1970-79

	Northeast	Southeast	Midwest	Southwest	West	
Distribution of academic library job openings (%)		26	15	33	10	16
Distribution of academic librarians employed—1970 (%)*		32	16	26	10	16

\*U.S., Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, *Library Statistics for Colleges and Universities: Data for Individual Institutions, Fall, 1969-Analytic Report* (Washington, D.C.: Govt. Print. Off., 1971) p. 74.

academic librarian, or for those contemplating entry into the field, to be cognizant of these serious problems and chart their futures accordingly.

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6. Bulletin #1852, p.2, 38.
7. Bulletin #1852, p.xi.