

The Manpower *What?*

Two interviewers conducting a library manpower study recently asked me for an assessment of future manpower needs in my library. They asked whether or not I thought there was a shortage of academic librarians. As a librarian reared professionally during a period of acute shortage, I was somewhat surprised to hear myself reply, "No, in our part of the country there does not seem to be a shortage; in fact, there may be a superabundance of 'generalist' librarians." Since then, I have asked several colleagues for assessments of the manpower situation in their areas. The results of my representative, unbiased sample of ten librarians suggest the following:

1. In some parts of the country there may be no shortage of librarians. Where a shortage exists, it is for specific, scarce specialties such as subject bibliographers, linguists, managerial specialists, and systems personnel.

2. Library school graduates can still obtain positions in colleges, but they may not be able to secure them in what are termed the "prestigious" institutions or in the preferred geographical locations. In other words, library school graduates must now be willing to go where the jobs are.

3. There may be a serious surplus of generalist librarians; that is, individuals who have earned only an A.B. degree in one of the humanistic disciplines and an M.L.S. from an accredited library school.

4. In many libraries where there are vacancies, the library is unable to fill them due to current budget stringencies.

If the above observations are valid, then the seller's market of recent years may no longer exist. Obviously this strengthens the hand of the employer, but what other effects could a buyer's market have on academic librarianship? What are some of the plus and minuses?

1. A library administration can be more selective in its recruitment programs, thus improving the overall quality of its library staff (a plus for administrators).

2. A library staff will tend to be more stable, although stability itself can be a double-edged sword (either a plus or a minus).

3. The bargaining power of many librarians will be weakened (a plus or minus, depending on one's position in the negotiations).

4. Individuals possessing scarce qualifications will maintain their strong bargaining positions (a plus or minus, depending on where you sit).

5. More librarians may be motivated to continue their formal education (a professional plus).

6. Increased competition may stimulate our best professionals to even greater accomplishments (a plus).

7. Some administrators might be tempted to defer needed managerial reforms, since dissidents can be replaced; however, I doubt that in the seventies this regressive policy of the thirties will be repeated (neither plus nor minus).

The rapid growth of library schools—a dozen new ones in the last five

years—also clouds the manpower question. Is it possible that we now have too many schools graduating too many librarians possessing the wrong set of credentials? An ironic turnabout when one recalls that in 1965 (at Detroit) the National Inventory of Library Needs claimed a shortage of 100,000 professionally trained librarians to meet ALA standards.

The actual situation today is probably one of sharp contrasts, a mixture of shortages and surpluses. As long as the surplus does not persist over a protracted period of time, the intensified professional competition, which a surplus should produce, ought to raise the overall quality of academic librarianship.

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In Forthcoming Issues—

Richard De Gennaro, Harvard University Libraries, on the Widener Library shelflist conversion and publication program

Gilbert Fairholm, New York State Division of the Budget, on library manpower budgeting

Allen Veaner, Stanford University Libraries, on major decision points in automation

Howard Clayton, University of Oklahoma, on femininity and job satisfaction among male library students

Amy Doherty, on Black Studies

Henry Voos, Rutgers University, on the information explosion

Bob Carmack and Trudi Loeber, University of Nebraska Libraries, on the library reserve system