

The Changing Nature of Work in Academic Libraries

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This paper reports the first stage of an investigation of the changing nature of academic library work. Through a content analysis of job advertisements appearing in *College & Research Libraries*, the paper reports on an analysis of the stated requirements for academic library jobs in terms of knowledge of computing and desirable behavioral characteristics. It also addresses changes occurring in some jobs.

Previous Investigations

Most of the studies based on job advertisements in library and information science have had as their purpose an analysis of the job market and the predictions of employment trends. In 1980 Block analyzed job announcements in a file maintained by the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Texas at Austin. Cataloging and reference positions comprised nearly half of the total jobs listed there.

Reser and Schuneman carried out a content analysis of 1,133 technical service positions and public services positions advertised in *American Libraries*, *College & Research Libraries News*, and *Library Journal* in 1988. They found that technical services jobs required more computer skills, greater foreign-language requirements, and previous work experience. Public services jobs required more advanced degrees.

Hong Xu conducted a content analysis of job ads appearing in *American Libraries* from 1971–1990 in order to identify similarities and differences in the jobs of catalog librarians and reference librarians working in academic libraries. Xu was particularly interested in identifying jobs brought about by developments in library automation. He analyzed 574 jobs stratified into four periods representing technological change in libraries: 1971–75; 1976–80; 1981–85; 1986–90. Xu found increasing needs for computer skills in both groups. Differences remained, however, in the major job responsibilities and in the knowledge and skills needed.

Robinson, seeking to identify skills and experiences required for collection development jobs, analyzed 433 ads in *College & Research Libraries News* from 1980–1991. Fifty-eight percent of the ads (251) combined collection development jobs with another function; about 80% of these were combined with reference jobs. Seventy-nine percent of the positions required degrees from ALA accredited programs; only 23% of the ads mentioned faculty status. Robinson also includes a good review of the literature on the use of job ads to assess the nature of library work.

Zhou analyzed trends in requirements for computer skills in academic library jobs. He found that jobs in technical and public services now require specific com-

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puter skills. Further, in the 1994 data, the last year of his analysis, nearly 88% of administration positions listed computer related qualifications. Zhou concludes that knowledge of computing now is integral to all jobs in academic libraries.

Using a different methodology, Buttlar and Garcha carried out a survey of 271 catalogers in order to determine through questionnaires the change catalogers identified in their work activities and roles during the period 1987–1997. More than 90% of the respondents reported that the core activities of their jobs remained the same: descriptive cataloging and the assignment of call numbers and subject headings, activities long associated with their careers. The catalogers did report that their roles had expanded to include managerial tasks, the training of others, and the inclusion of electronic materials. Buttlar and Garcha also found that some catalogers were becoming involved in the activities relating to database development and maintenance. A small but growing number of catalogers reported being engaged in reference desk work, collection development and bibliographic instruction, with job sharing on the rise.

Questions Guiding This Study

Our interest is in the changing nature of library work. We expect that change in work will lead to change in organizational structure and design. Several questions thus guided this investigation.

- Do the jobs being advertised in the 1990s show significant changes in content over the jobs being advertised in the 1980s?
- How wide spread are job requirements relating to technology? That is, do more jobs include specific technologies in their requirements?
- Are behavior skills such as “ability to work in a team environment” appearing more frequently? Were such behavioral requirements found in 1980s ads?
- Does job content, as reflected in advertisements, show significant differences depending upon the type of institution the job is in?
- What change can be observed in the administrative patterns in academic libraries and in the functional departments in those libraries? We expected this change to be observed in that fewer assistant director and assistant department head jobs would appear in the 1990s.

Methodology

A content analysis of job advertisements was selected

as the methodology for this study. The assumption is that the advertisement will indicate the ideal job as defined by the employer at a particular point in time and the library will include in the ad those knowledge, skills, and abilities it believes to be important at the time. The ad defines the job without making the necessary adjustments to the job when a person already is in the job. Since we were looking for indicators of changes in library work, the ideal design is what we sought.

Job advertisements appearing in *College & Research Libraries News* for the month of March in 1983, 1988, 1993, and 1998 were used, a total of 211 ads. *College & Research Libraries News* was selected because jobs advertised here reach a national audience of about 12,000 subscribers, not a regional or local audience. It was assumed that these jobs would reflect change occurring in academic libraries and thus would display a variation over time. We assumed that 1983 would be a baseline year and that technological imperatives would grow over the next fifteen years. March was selected arbitrarily.

The job categories used in this study were based upon those used in the placement center at conferences on the American Library Association. Twelve categories were used:

- A. Administration (deans, directors, AULS, etc.)
 - A1. Other Administrative Positions (Personnel Officer, etc.)
 - A2. Head of a subject library (Chemistry, Art, etc.)
 - A3. Head of a Library Dept. (function: Reference, Cataloging, etc.)
- D. General and Subject Reference.
 - E1. Instruction Librarian. (coordinator of instruction)
 - E2. Extension/Distance Learning Librarian.
- F. Technical Services (acquisitions, cataloger, serials).
- H. Collection development.
- I. Special materials (any position) government documents, maps, rare books, archives, audio-visual, etc.
- J. Information systems (automation, bibliographic utilities, networks, systems, etc.
- K. Non-library settings.

Table 1 lists number of positions advertised by job title by date. The title of the job was used, although if the title was not descriptive enough, assignment of the title was taken out of the content of the ad.

The *Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*, published in 1994 by the Carnegie Foundation for the

Advancement of Teaching, was used to classify the libraries advertising. The classifications used were: Research Universities, Doctoral Universities, Master's (Comprehensive) Colleges and Universities, Baccalaureate (Liberal Arts) colleges, and Associate of Arts Colleges. While the Carnegie Classifications includes two groupings in most classes, the groups I and II in each category were collapsed into a single class in this study. Table 2 shows the distribution of the ads. 48% of the

ads were for jobs in libraries serving research universities. Of the 3,595 institutions included in the 1994 Carnegie classification, 125 or 3% were research universities. We assumed that these large libraries were more able to design new jobs reflecting new demands in technology than smaller libraries were and we further assumed that the large libraries have more freedom to experiment with new job designs than small libraries do. Historically the large libraries have pioneered in most change in academic libraries.

The authors did a small pilot study of twelve jobs advertised in a February 1998 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in order to assess coding and determine the presence of some of the variables. Of these, seven jobs had traditional titles, e.g., Social Science Reference Librarian, Assistant/Associate Director of Technical Services. One job displayed a title which extended the reference librarian's job, Information Services Librarian. Two jobs had what we called emerging titles, e.g., Access Services Manager. One job, advertised by a Research I university, was an innovative or new title, Information Consultant.

To assess the job content relating to computing the authors used the checklist of computer-related codes developed and used by Zhou. The computer codes used were

1. bibliographic utilities, such as OCLC or RLIN;
2. automated library systems, including general knowledge of library automation;
3. online database searching, such as DIALOG or BRS;
4. microcomputer applications;
5. mainframe computer applications;
6. CD-ROM products;
7. computer languages or programming;
8. computer hardware;
9. possession of a degree in computer science.
10. networks, such as LAN or WAN;
11. Internet searching.
12. resources in electronic formats;
13. image technology or multimedia.

To assess job requirements relating to behavioral descriptions, the authors devel-

Job title	1983	1988	1993	1998	Total
A	8	16	6	13	43
A1	0	2	0	0	2
A2	2	6	0	0	8
A3	3	10	5	6	24
subtotal in A:					77
D	1	11	7	9	28
E1	0	0	0	0	0
E2	0	1	0	0	1
F	6	8	3	6	23
H	0	1	1	3	5
I	3	6	2	2	13
J	1	3	0	2	6
K	0	1	0	0	1
subtotal in D-K:					77
A2/D	2	3	2	0	7
A3/D	1	1	1	1	4
D/H	2	11	4	5	22
A3/F	0	1	0	0	1
D/F	0	2	0	1	3
E1/D/H	0	2	0	0	2
A2/D/H	0	1	0	1	2
H/J/D	0	1	0	4	5
A2/H	0	0	2	0	2
E1/D	0	0	1	2	3
H/J	0	0	1	0	1
A3/J	0	0	0	1	1
D/F/H	0	0	0	1	1
D/H/A3	0	0	0	1	1
D/E1/A3	0	0	0	1	1
I/J	0	0	0	1	1
Subtotal in Combination:					57
Total	29	87	35	60	211

Class	1983	1988	1993	1998	Total	%
Research Universities	17	42	19	23	101	48%
Doctoral Universities	3	17	2	6	28	13%
Master's	3	17	9	16	45	21%
Baccalaureate (Liberal arts)	5	9	3	11	28	13%
Associate Arts	1	1	2	4	8	4%
Total	29	86	35	60	210	*

* 99% due to rounding

oped a set of codes from an examination of the pilot data and a review of the literature on organizational change in libraries. The paper by Roy Tennant was particularly helpful. The behavioral codes used were:

1. communication skills (includes oral and/or written);
2. interpersonal skills;
3. service orientation/public service;
4. work effectively with faculty, students, staff;
5. collegial environment;
6. creative/creativity;
7. energetic/enthusiastic/outgoing;
8. flexibility;
9. team member/team environment;
10. work in a changing, dynamic, expanding environment.

The authors analyzed a sample set of ads to assess the level of agreement in coding. One author did the job title coding and both authors reviewed the coding and, in the event of disagreement, arrived at a consensus.

For the purposes of this paper we analyzed three groups of jobs. The first group, Group A, Administration (Deans, Directors, AULs, etc.), was analyzed because of our interest in change in organizational structures in academic libraries. We expected to see a significant difference in the duties and responsibilities of the AUL position. We expected to find job ads that stated a description of organizational change from a hierarchical structure to a team-based, flattened structure.

The second groups of job was the general and subject reference jobs, Group D. We were interested in how electronic resources were incorporated into the job. We

also sought some indication of the role of instruction in the reference jobs.

The third group of jobs comprised those which displayed a combination of jobs, those showing a combination (A2/D, etc.) in table 1. Our purpose is to study the changing nature of work in academic libraries, so this latter group is of particular interest to us. These fifty seven positions combine many of the tasks that have defined the work of the academic librarian: collection development, reference, cataloging. Buttlar and Garcha had reported that a growing number of catalogers were engaged in reference desk work, collection development, and bibliographic instruction. These participants reported "job sharing" on the rise. Robinson also reported a wide spread sharing of collection development work with other jobs. We interpret this as reflecting a change in professional work in academic libraries and we wanted to assess such changes.

Results

Over 80% of all jobs being advertised required a degree from an ALA accredited program. This replicates the finding of Robinson who reported that 79% of the ads he studied required a degree from an ALA accredited program. The largest libraries, those in Research I and II universities, are more likely not to mention the ALA degree, but in general the policy adopted by ACRL in the 1970s has been accepted by the field:

The master's degree from a program accredited by the American Library Association is the ap-

appropriate professional degree for librarians. (Source: Policy 54.2. *ALA Handbook of Organization 1998-99*, p.45.)

A second policy adopted by ACRL in the 1970s, Faculty Status of College and University Librarians, was less widely accepted. ACRL has, as policy:

The intellectual contributions made by academic librarians to the teaching, research, and service mission of their colleges and universities merit the granting of faculty status. Faculty status for librarians should entail the same rights and responsibilities granted to and required of other members of the faculty. (Source: Policy 54.5. *ALA Handbook of Organization 1998-99*, p. 45.)

Forty-three percent of the ads in this study included faculty status in the ad.

Administrative Jobs

Fifty percent of all administrative positions in this study required some knowledge of or experience with automated library systems, this most often being a general knowledge of library automation (50% of ads in 1983; 50% in 1988; 40% in 1993; 62% in 1998). More specific aspects of automation, such as knowledge of particular bibliographic utilities or online data base searching, were not included in the administrative job ads.

In terms of behavioral requirements, strong communication skills, both oral and written, emerged as the most frequently mentioned skill (25% in 1983; 50% in 1988; 80% in 1993; 45% in 1998). Communication skills were followed by interpersonal skills and the ability to work effectively with faculty, students, and staff.

From the data on administrative jobs we could not identify much interest in "ability to work in a team environment" nor was change identified in the administrative patterns in libraries. Only one job ad, for an AUL position in a Research I library, stated explicitly that "The library system, as it evolves into a functional team rather than a traditional line management approach, is seeking someone to initiate change".

The job content for the administrative jobs reflected the historical approach to library management. The interest in strong communication and interpersonal skills and a general knowledge of library automation have been added to the general management knowledge and skills

of planning, organizing, budgeting. Generally speaking, the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for director and associate/assistant director jobs are well known and the job easily defined.

Leadership was not a variable that was included in this study. It emerged, however, as an important consideration in the administrative job category. Forty-two percent of all jobs required some evidence of leadership (25% in 1983; 38% in 1988; 67% in 1993; 46% in 1998).

Reference Jobs

The duties of the reference librarian included instruction and online searching in the 1980s. The one job ad in 1983 mentioned "orientation," which we interpret as the earlier form of the library's instruction program. Eight of the 10 ads in 1988 included instruction, seven included online searching, and six had collection development responsibilities. Two of the ads titled the jobs differently, one being "Information Services Librarian" and other being "Automated Information Access/Reference Librarian".

In the 1980s behavioral characteristics began to appear in the reference ads. Oral and written communication skills emerged most often.

In the 1990s oral and written communication skills were common in the reference jobs ads. Instruction duties were included in all job ads. Online searching and collection development were mentioned in four.

In 1998 the variable, leadership, appeared in three of the nine ads.

The title, "reference librarian" continued to be the most common title until 1998. In 1998 the reference jobs were called:

- Electronic Services Reference Librarian
- Information Literacy Librarian
- Library faculty/Reference Librarian
- Reference/Agricultural Librarian
- Reference/Business Librarian
- Reference/Science Librarian
- Reference/Social Science Librarian
- Social Science Reference Librarian

One continued to use "Reference Librarian." All reference jobs required the degree from an ALA accredited program.

Combination Jobs

The emergence of the combination positions may be

the results of budget concerns, “we must do more with less.” We suspect, though, that the current jobs in academic librarianship are shifting from the traditional, functional specialist positions, to more expansive and complex jobs. It is clear that these types of positions are on the rise. In the data set from 1983, combination jobs represented 14% of the total positions advertised. The percentage increased to 25% in 1988, 31% in 1993, and 32% in 1998.

While it might have been expected that computer related skills would increase dramatically in the 1990s, the combination jobs are not laden with such requirements. In positions requiring reference services, online database searching was often mentioned and the cataloging positions referred to knowledge of the bibliographic utilities. There was no tendency, however, to list numerous computer skills across the board. The most consistent computer related skills were broad and general, eg, “working with resources in electronic formats” or “knowledge of computerized systems.”

The requirement of behavioral traits also increased with time in these jobs. The earliest data emphasize skills, not behaviors, in the ads; communication skills are listed in two jobs and only one mention is made of public service. In the 1998 set, however, communications skills occur in 12 of the 19 positions. Terms such as “creativity,” “enthusiasm,” “flexibility” begin to show up in the 1988 data and increase into the 1990s sets. Only in the 1990s do the concepts of “team environment” or “changing environment” appear. Tennant suggests that it may be more productive to look at personality traits instead of specific skills when hiring for the future. These new combined positions show a growing interest in behavioral characteristics.

Discussion

The results of the first stage of our investigation do enable us to conclude that most academic library jobs require a degree from an ALA accredited program. Over 80% of the jobs require the degree. The master’s degree from an ALA accredited program, adopted as policy by the Association of College and Research Libraries in the 1970s, has been adopted by the field as the appropriate professional degree for academic librarians.

The field has incorporated the computing technologies into all jobs. The computer requirements in the 1990s ads were stated in broad terms, not in specific skill requirements. Since the ALA accredited degree is a requirement, the assumption of employers is that knowledge of all aspects of computer technologies as they relate to

library and information science will be an integral part of a graduate’s knowledge base. Therefore, computer skills, a solid knowledge of technological design and application, and knowledge of information resources in all formats must be integral components of all LIS educational programs, and the educational programs must keep pace with change in technology as must the academic libraries.

Instruction has become an integral part of every reference job and some responsibility for collection development is emerging as an important component of these jobs. Job titles are displaying these content changes. How LIS programs deal with these changes in jobs and the requirements for the knowledge base is an important question. Avery and Ketchner report that library instruction is not taught formally in many LIS programs. Programs, however, must look carefully at what kinds of teaching skills and learning theories should be included in the curriculum in order to meet the instructional responsibilities now found in jobs.

The titles of reference jobs and the emergence of more combination jobs do suggest the changing nature of library work. The administrative job ads, however, did not reflect change in organizational structures. The data simply do not describe what we are searching for in terms of organizational structure. Organizational changes, however, have begun to appear in the more entry level jobs where departmental and unit team environments were mentioned. These results are tantalizing and require further investigation using different methods.

The growing requirement for behavior skills, especially oral and written communication skills, in entry level and well as administrative level positions, also suggest changes in the nature of the work librarians do. Technical skills continue to be important, but jobs now require the ability to communicate well with people inside and outside the library. Requirements for “flexibility”, “creativity”, and “leadership” also suggest that jobs are changing and that libraries are too.

These findings require more detailed and careful study of the jobs themselves, not just of the advertisements for these jobs.

Notes

1. David Block, “Emerging Personnel Requirements in Academic Libraries as Reflected in Recent Positions Announcements.” ERIC (ED 215 703) 1980.
2. David W. Reser and Anita P. Schuneman, “The

Academic Library Job Market: a Content Analysis Comparing Public and Technical Services," *College & Research Libraries*, 53 (January 1992): 49–59.

3. Hong Xu, "The Impact of Automation on Job Requirements and Qualifications for Catalogers and Reference Librarians in Academic Libraries," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 40 (January 1996): 9–59.

4. William C. Robinson, "Academic Library Collection Development and Management Positions: Announcements in *College & Research Libraries News* from 1980 through 1991," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 37 (April 1993): 134–46.

5. Zhou Yuan, "Analysis of Trends in Demand for Computer-Related Skills for Academic Librarians from

1974 to 1994," *College & Research Libraries*, 57 (May 1996): 259–72.

6. Lois Buttlar and Rajinder Garcha, "Catalogers in Academic Libraries: Their Evolving and Expanding Roles," *College & Research Libraries* 59 (July 1998): 311–21.

7. Zhou, 260.

8. Roy Tennant, "The Most Important Management Decision: Hiring Staff for the New Millennium," *Library Journal* (February 15, 1998): 102.

9. Tennant, 102.

10. Chris Avery and Kevin Ketchner, "Do Instruction Skills Impress Employers?" *College & Research Libraries* 57 (May 1996): 249–58.