

# A Look at Now and Then: Salaries of Academic and Research Librarians

*Tom Terrell and Vicki L. Gregory*

Academic librarians live firmly with in two worlds. They are part of the faculty of universities and they are also part of the community of librarians. As such their salaries, or lack thereof, tell an interesting story of the financial rise and fall of both of these communities. This paper is a historical and longitudinal study of salary trends within academia, librarianship, and specifically academic librarianship. Watershed events and trends within these communities will be identified and discussed, and their impact on current salaries will be examined.

In March 1946, Winston Churchill, in his “Sinews Of Peace” speech, outlined what was to be the blueprint for Anglo-American cooperation and the operation of the United Nations for the next 50 years.<sup>1</sup> This speech coined the phrase iron curtain and set the tone for military and industrial research culminating in the space race. Much of this research took place in universities. In 1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his final presidential speech warned America about the dangers of the military industrial complex. He had very specific remarks for universities.

...akin to, and largely responsible for the sweeping changes in our industrial-military posture, has been the technological revolution during recent decades.

In this revolution, research has become central; it also becomes more formalized, complex, and costly. A steadily increasing share is conducted for, by, or at the direction of, the Federal government.

Today, the solitary inventor, tinkering in his shop, has been overshadowed by task forces of scientists in laboratories and testing fields. In the same fashion, the free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. Partly because of the huge costs involved, a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity. For every old blackboard there are now hundreds of new electronic computers.

The prospect of domination of the nation’s scholars by Federal employment, project al-

---

*Tom Terrell is Assistant Professor, email: gregory@luna.cas.usf.edu; and Vicki L. Gregory is Director and Professor, email: gregory@luna.cas.usf.edu; at University of South Florida.*

## A Look at Now and Then: Salaries of Academic and Research Librarians

locations, and the power of money is ever present and is gravely to be regarded.<sup>2</sup>

Between Churchill in 1946 and Eisenhower in 1960, there was a fundamental shift in the nature of college research libraries and librarians. We will take as our start the midway between these two important speeches, 1952, and consider the impact on academic librarianship. Before that turbulent time, the basic tools and techniques of research librarianship were fairly stable, as had been the research role of the university. The emphasis in funded research and the computer have added many jobs to the university and general economy. The jobs represented by many of today's Fortune 500 companies did not exist in 1952. The role of librarian exists in a very different form than it did in 1952. Many of the things that directly or indirectly changed the nature of academic librarianship were born of the events discussed in these speeches.

In 1952 the average salary for starting librarians and fresh out of library school was between \$3,350 and \$3,400.<sup>3</sup> In that year the *Library Journal* salary and placement survey reported 1,370 placements, of which 386 were in college and university libraries. This made academic libraries the second most frequent employer of new graduates, a position still held today. The mean salary for university library staff in 1952/1953 was \$3,334.70.<sup>5</sup> The beginning comparable average government salary in 1952 was \$3,410, so academic librarianship was competitive for the time. In 2002, the beginning salary for academic librarians was \$35,883.<sup>4</sup> The comparable starting salary for a professional civil service job with a master's degree (GS-9) was \$35,519.<sup>6</sup> These numbers are still very close after 50 years. We will take a closer look at the trends that shaped the intervening 50 years, where so much changed and yet stayed the same.

In 1952, Clarence Long wrote that "Pay of academics has lagged behind comparable professions and manual labor."<sup>7</sup> He went on to explain that real purchasing power for academics at all levels had not kept up with inflation during the period from 1940 to 1950 and that professors had actually lost purchasing power when their 1952 salary levels were compared

to those of 1910.<sup>8</sup> In 2001, the pay for first-year academic librarians rose less than the rate of inflation.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1952 *College and Research Libraries* annual economic report, some trends emerge from the salary statistics. Table 1 shows that even 50 years ago large urban universities (group 1) paid better than medium sized local colleges (group 2) and much better than small private universities (group 3). More experience and more responsibility translated to more money, and the pay differential was greater in higher-paying jobs than in the lower-level jobs.<sup>10</sup> When we also compare the salary of a librarian at a Group 1 institution to that of a Johns Hopkins instructor, the librarian comes out on top, \$3,458 to \$3,300.

The societal norms of the day were quite different from those of today. Opportunities for women with graduate degrees were limited, but education and librarianship offered opportunity for employment and intellectual stimulation in a socially acceptable environment. Employment for women was viewed, frequently incorrectly, as a supplemental income rather than a primary one. It was a pervasive mindset that it was acceptable to pay a man more for the same work because he was viewed as the breadwinner. This was among several pervasive mindsets that would be challenged over the next few years. Libraries and universities were generally still segregated in 1952, and neither the AAUP Bulletin nor *Library Journal* identified minority placements in annual data.

These data set a baseline for comparison to the current situation. Fifty years ago, the job of academic librarian paid about as well as the job of instructor, and about as well as average government workers salary of \$3,410.<sup>11</sup> One main difference was that most government workers and university instructors were male, while most academic librarians were female.

In the early 1960s, when Eisenhower warned us about the issues of federal research money in the university, professors, instructors and university librarians were making strides toward better pay. Research

**Table 1. College Librarian Average Salaries, 1952**

Group (median enrollment)	University Librarian	Division Head	Department Head	Professional
Group 1 (7432)	\$8,250	\$5,324	\$4,400	\$3,468
Group 2 (1669)	\$5,936	\$4,200	\$3,400	\$3,300
Group 3 (619)	\$4,005	\$3,250	\$3,125	\$2,700

money was filling the coffers at (some) universities and science and research took on increased emphasis. This led to the hiring of more librarians at colleges and universities. The placement picture for librarians was bright. "There were far more positions than there were graduates to take them and this despite the fact that the number of graduates (and placements) was in 1960 the highest of any in the 10 year period" [from 1950 to 1960]. The newly graduated librarian of 1960 could expect a salary of \$5,083.<sup>12</sup> Academic placements continued to lag placement in public libraries, if only by one or two percent. The average salary for an instructor in 1960 was \$5,682. This is slightly more than the average starting salary for librarians that year. Professors received \$10,820 per year, associate professors \$8,397 per year and assistant professors \$7,056 per year. In spite of seemingly high professorial salaries, real earning power for professors declined and real earning power for assistant professors increased dramatically. "It has been the position of previous reports in this series that full and associate professors have in recent years been underpaid, not only absolutely, but also in relation to the compensation levels of a lower academic ranks."<sup>13</sup> Salary compression in academic environment had reared its head. Search committees still face the problem of recruiting new personnel to fill numerous vacancies, while maintaining salary equity with existing faculty.

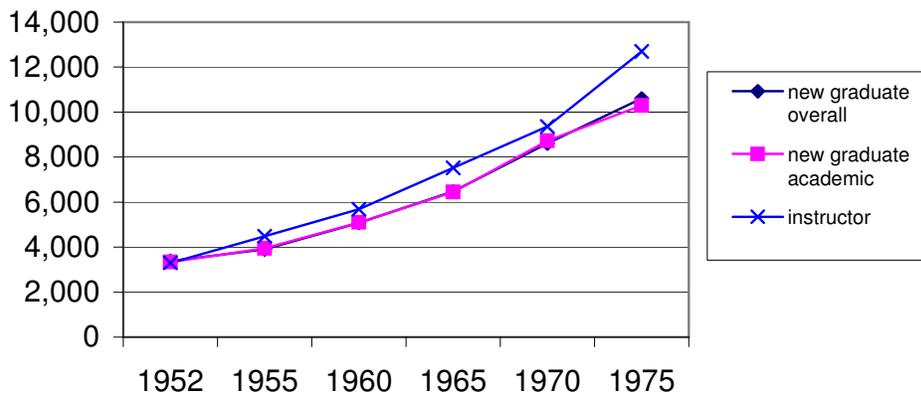
In the 1964 *Library Journal* report, it was noted that academic libraries accounted for 34 percent of the placements, while public libraries accounted for 29 percent.<sup>14</sup> Academic libraries also had the greatest unmet recruiting needs. All library types were in great need of personnel, but the authors succinctly explained a point which is still true today. "... one must remember that library school graduates are peculiar breed. Unlike the products of other graduate programs they are not homogeneous to an extreme. They displayed and are re of differences in background which defies analysis. Their kinds of training, their educational level, their experience are diverse. Some are just 'fresh out of college,' with bachelor's degrees in everything from art to zoology; some (a rather sizable portion, in fact) have the chance subject or professional degrees; some are academically revived homemakers and, some are transfers for fields and occupations as divergent as teaching, laboratory research, farming, business, law, the ministry and the military."

By 1964, the picture had changed in several ways. Samuel Sass called librarians a "persecuted minority" due to the lack of suitable salaries being offered even in an era of critical personnel shortage. The other significant trend that year was the recruiting of black professionals into all types of libraries and into better paying careers outside of librarianship. "The other matter, also much in the news is a wild scramble now going on for professional Negro workers. Practically every major business and industrial firm in the country is frantically trying to recruit Negroes as engineers, chemists, physicists and for all anyone knows even librarians."<sup>15</sup> Placement in academic libraries surpassed any other category, accounting for 35 percent of total placements. Public libraries were second with 29 percent. The average starting librarians salary in 1965 was \$6,468. Even in the sellers market of 1965, some librarians, in and out of academia chose "family considerations" over higher salaries. One student was "offered a better position at the university, but because of children, she wanted a nine-months' [sic] position." The authors go on to conclude that "[a] husband or children, or a liking for the small or the remote (in geographical or institutional terms) constitute certain and sure blocks to achieving a good salary. But there is a brighter side to this coin. With libraries as widespread as they are... it is at least possible for individual to have his professional and personal cake and eat it too, even if the professional cake proves to be a little on the thin side, salary wise."<sup>16</sup>

Profound changes swept the academic landscape in the last half of the 1960s. Academic libraries led the way as employers, placing a high of 37 percent of the 1967 graduates, but this slipped to 32 percent in 1970. There was concern whether there would be jobs for all of the graduates in 1970. The average salary for beginning academic librarians in 1970 was \$8,719 compared \$8,611, the overall average starting salary. Minority candidates were actively recruited and readily placed in all types of libraries. The salaries for faculty were in line with this, as the average for instructors was \$9,360.<sup>17</sup>

Percentage of placements in academic libraries declined in the early 1970s to 25 percent in 1975. Average starting salary was \$10,297 for academic libraries and \$10,594 for all types. University instructor salaries were 12,691. Figure 1 maps these trends from the launch of Sputnik to the end of the Apollo

Figure 1: Comparison of Librarian and Instructor Salaries in Real Dollars 1952–1975.



program, showing the steady rise of salaries for more than 20 years. This chart also shows the similarity among starting librarians, both academic and overall, and university instructors.

In the 1980s, the outlook for new academic librarians was good. The starting salary in 1980 was \$14,037<sup>18</sup> and the ARL average salary was \$21,419.<sup>19</sup> The inclusion of the ARL data is somewhat confusing, as it contains librarians of all ranks, but it is instructive to show a more realistic professional average than new placement data. It also compares very favorably to the instructor average salary at the time, which was \$14,023 and even the overall faculty average, which was \$21,348.<sup>20</sup> In 1985, measured progress continued, with new graduates choosing academic librarianship receiving an average of \$18,783 (below the overall average of \$19,753) and the ARL average at \$29,643.<sup>21</sup> Faculty salaries increased at a slightly faster rate, to \$20,230 for instructors and \$30,447 overall.<sup>22</sup>

The end of the 1980s brought with it a recession that was in full swing in 1990. The placement picture was poor for new graduates although salaries did continue slowly upward. Starting academic salaries continued to trail the overall average, \$24,045 to \$25,306

<sup>23</sup>and the ARL average was \$38,894.<sup>24</sup> The instructor average was \$25,030 and the overall average was \$40,133.<sup>25</sup> In 1995, new technologies were on the horizon and new opportunities were in hand for graduates of library schools. The average starting salary for all graduates was \$28,997 and for those working in academic libraries it was \$28,399<sup>26</sup> while the ARL average

reached \$45,425.<sup>27</sup> Faculty salaries continued to pull away, with instructors making an average of \$29,665 and the overall faculty average reaching \$47,811.<sup>28</sup>

At the end of the fifty year period, the salary picture picks up again. The overall average for new graduates for 2001 was \$36,818 and the salary for academic librarians was \$35,883.<sup>29</sup> The overall average for ARL librarians is \$56,150.<sup>30</sup> The latest AAUP data shows instructor salary at \$36,620 and overall faculty at \$62,895.<sup>31</sup> This is not the whole story. How did it all go? How do these various tracks compare to each other? Has academic librarianship made progress or just stayed with the cost of living for 50 years?

Table 2 revisits Table 1, but converts the values to 2001 dollars.<sup>32</sup> It is clear that real progress has been made, well beyond the cost of living. An entry level librarian makes today the equivalent purchasing power of a department head 50 years ago and a head librar-

Table 2. 1952 College Librarian Average Salaries in 2001 dollars

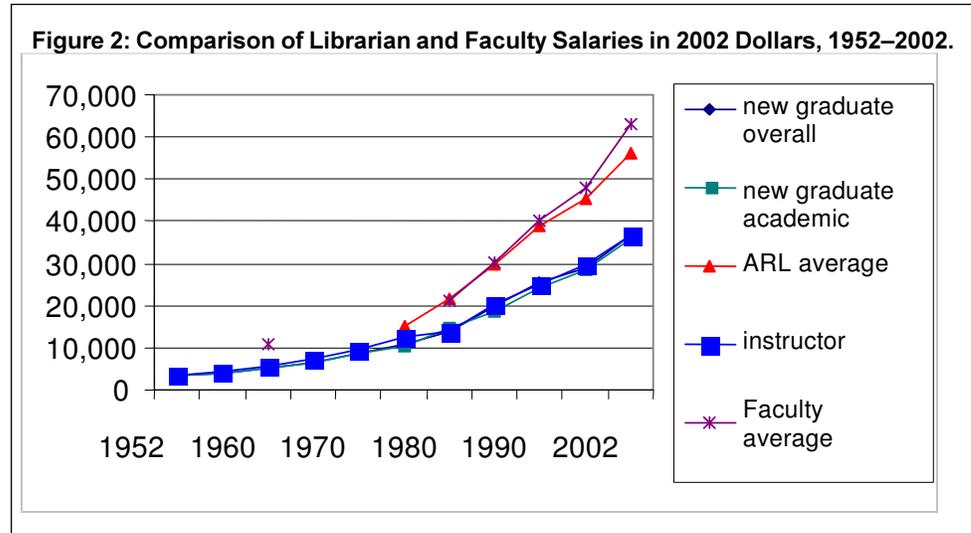
	University Librarian	Division Head	Department Head	Professional
1952 Salaries in 1952 dollars	\$8,250	\$5,324	\$4,400	\$3,468
1952 Salaries in 2001 dollars	\$56,195	36,265	\$29,291	\$23,622
2001 Salaries in 2001 dollars	\$134,481	\$59,703	\$62,500	\$44,000
Annual gain in 2001 dollars	\$78,286	\$23,438	\$32,529	\$20,378

ian in 2001<sup>32</sup> made more than twice the earning power of her 1952 counterpart. This is clear and substantial progress.

Figure 2 shows clearly that the salaries of entry-level academic librarians have kept pace with the average of all other entry-level librarians and with the average salary of instructors. The average salaries of ARL librarians and university faculty are also quite comparable, although faculty

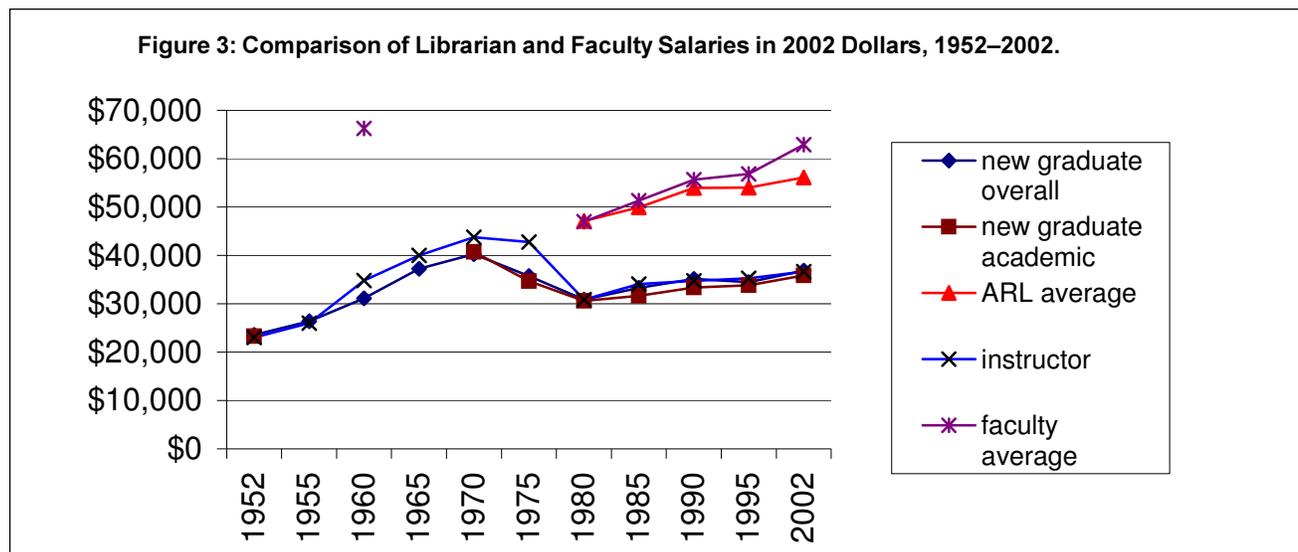
have made gains in the last few years. One of the other issues impact this may be the retirement of a large group of library directors and senior librarians in the last ten years.<sup>34</sup> As these individuals retire, they are replaced with younger, consequently less expensive, people. This group, retiring almost *en masse*, may have had the effect of moderating salary growth at the highest levels.

Figure 3 shows the relative purchasing power of the same group of salaries in 2001 dollars.<sup>35</sup> This shows the relationship between compensation and the cost of living. All measures reflect a steady rise in real purchasing power from 1952 to 1975, then a loss of purchasing power from 1985 to 1990, and a steady gradual climb since then. The main message of both of these



charts is that academic librarians are not alone. University faculty, other librarians and most government professional workers share the same pattern of purchasing power.

Academic librarians generally compare well to their colleagues in the classroom. There have been times when one group fell behind and steps were taken to catch up. Sometimes these steps required librarians to do something that seems to not be in their nature; extolling their own virtues. This has come in several forms, one of which is underway now. The ALA task force on salaries is a keystone of the presidency of Mitch Friedman, and while it does not limit its scope to academic libraries, it certainly welcomes them. This taskforce has a website located at [www.ala.org/advocacy](http://www.ala.org/advocacy).<sup>36</sup>



## *A Look at Now and Then: Salaries of Academic and Research Librarians*

One of the issues that specifically impacts academic librarians is the adoption of distance learning at most colleges and universities. Academic libraries are expected to provide reference services to people in all time zones and using all manner of hardware and operating systems to connect to the librarian. They are also frequently the first stop for help when a student has trouble with the course management utilities used by the university.<sup>37</sup> Academic librarians are also frequently the expert resources used by faculty on matters of copyright. All of these web-centered responsibilities have grown into the job description since the mid-1990s. During that time, when technological expertise was needed in every department, many of the students graduating from library school chose to work in commercial information venues.<sup>38</sup> Many have come back to the relative security of the campus after the dot-com failures of 2000 and 2001, and salaries continue to rise faster than inflation<sup>39</sup>, so academic libraries are an appealing career once again.

Finally, academic librarians owe it to themselves and the profession to do a better job of explaining the many skills that they possess and the services that they can provide. Cynthia Shamel, in "Building a Brand: Got Librarian?" explains that many different "information experts" from business, communication, and computer science are staking claim to the things that librarians have done well for millennia.<sup>40</sup> If academic librarians are not assertive and proactive, then others will choose the nature of the future of the discipline. They will make decisions based on ignorance, and the universities and the librarians will pay the price.

### References

1. Winston Churchill. "Sinews of Peace" <http://www.hpol.org/churchill/>.
2. Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Farewell Address" <http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu/farewell.htm>. 1960
3. Donald and Ruth Strout, "The Placement Picture," *Library Journal* 78, no. 11 (1953): 952–55
4. Tom Terrell, "Salaries Rebound, Women Break Out," *Library Journal* 127, no. 17 (2002): 30–34, 36.
5. Robert Molyneux, "Gerould Data." *The Gerould Statistics 1907/08–1961/62*, Second Edition, 1998. <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/gerould/tgschap3.html>.
6. U. S. Office of Personnel Management, "Salary Table 2003-GS," *2003 General Schedule*. <http://www.opm.gov/oca/03tables/html/gs.asp>.
7. Clarence Long. "Professors' Salaries and the Inflation" *AAUP Bulletin* 38, no. 4 (1952): 577–91.
8. Ibid.
9. Tom Terrell and Vicki Lovelady Gregory. "Plenty of Jobs, Salaries Flat." *Library Journal* 126, no. 17 (2001): 34–37, 39–40.
10. "College and University Library Statistics," *College & Research Libraries* 13, no. 1 (1952): 68–81
11. Long, "Professors' Salaries and the Inflation."
12. Donald and Ruth Strout, "Higher Salaries, More Vacancies," *Library Journal* 78, no. 11 (1961): 2266–72.
13. "The Economic Status of the Profession 1961–1962: Report on the Self-Grading Compensation Survey," *AAUP Bulletin* 48, no. 2 (1962): 120–54.
14. Donald and Ruth Strout, "The Malady Lingers On," *Library Journal* 89, no. 12 (1964): 2551–55.
15. Samuel Sass, "A Persecuted Minority," *Library Journal* 91, no. 12 (1966): 3126–27.
16. Strout, "The Malady Lingers On." 3117–26.
17. Carlyle Frarey and Mary Donley, "Placement and Salaries in 1970: The Year That Was *Not* What it Seemed," *Library Journal* 96, no. 12 (1971): 1937–41.
18. Carol Learmont and Stephen van Houton, "Placement and Salaries in 1980: Holding the Line," *Library Journal* 106, no. 17 (1981): 1881–87.
19. Martha Kyrillidou, "Salary Trends Highlight Inequities—Old and New," *ARL: A Bimonthly Report on Research Library Issues and Actions from ARL, CNI, and SPARC* 208/209: 6–12.
20. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). "Table 237: Average salary of full-time instructional faculty on 9-month contracts in degree-granting institutions, by academic rank, sex, and control and type of institution: 1970–71 to 1998–99," *Digest of Education Statistics 2001: Chapter 3, Postsecondary Education*. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/digest2001/tables/dt237.asp>.
21. Carol Learmont and Stephen van Houton, "Placement and Salaries in 1985: Little Change," *Library Journal* 101, no. 7 (1986): 31–38.
22. NCES, "Table 237."
23. Faye Zipkowitz "Placement and Salaries in 1990: Losing Ground in the Recession," *Library Journal* 116, no. 18 (1991): 44–50.
24. Kyrillidou, "Salary Trends Highlight Inequities," 6–12.
25. NCES, "Table 237."
26. Herbert Carson, "Beginner's Luck: A Growing Job Market" *Library Journal* 121, no. 17 (1996): 29–35.

27. Kyrillidou, "Salary Trends Highlight Inequities," 6-12.
28. NCES, "Table 237."
29. Terrell and Gregory, "Plenty of Jobs, Salaries Flat."
30. Martha Kyrillidou and Mark Young, "ARL Annual Salary Survey 2001-02" <http://www.arl.org/stats/pubpdf/ss01.pdf>.
31. "What Professors Earn" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 19, 2002. <http://chronicle.com/free/v48/i32/4832aaup.htm>.
32. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), U.S. Department of Labor, "Table Containing History of CPI-U U.S. All Items Indexes and Annual Percent Changes From 1913 to Present" (2002). <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/cpi/cpi.ai.txt>.
33. Kyrillidou and Young, "ARL Annual Salary Survey 2001-02."
34. Stanley Wilder, "Changing Profile of Research Library Professional Staff," *ARL: A Bimonthly Report on Research Library Issues and Actions from ARL, CNI, and SPARC* 208/209 (2000): 6-12.
35. BLS, "Table Containing History of CPI-U U.S."
36. "Freedman's March," *Library Journal* 127, no. 13 (2002): 42-48.
37. Tom Terrell and Meredith Ault, "Distance Learning Abroad: Challenges and Solutions to Distance Learning Library Services to Foreign Countries." American Library Association Annual Conference. (2000) Chicago, Ill.
38. Vicki Gregory and Sonia Ramirez Wohlmuth "Better Pay, More Jobs," *Library Journal* 125, no. 17 (2000): 30-36.
39. Michael O'Connor and Martha Kyrillidou, "ARL Librarian Salaries Rise Faster Than Inflation" *ARL: A Bimonthly Report on Research Library Issues and Actions from ARL, CNI, and SPARC* 208/209: 16.
40. Cynthia Shamel, "Building a Brand: Got Librarian?" *Searcher* 10, no. 7 (2002): 60-71.