



“It May or May Not Work Out”:

The Opportunities and Uncertainties of Temporary Library Employment

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Introduction

Temporary academic library positions come with a lot of uncertainty. Librarians and archivists in temporary positions can face uncertainty about their job responsibilities, uncertainty about their roles within their team, and uncertainty about their next career move.

While “temporary” librarian or archivist titles are subjective terms that can encompass part-time, adjunct, and paraprofessional labor, this research project surveyed full-time, United States-based academic library or archives positions with a contract of three or fewer years and the hiring requirement that candidates hold a Master’s degree in library information science. This includes residencies, project roles, and visiting appointments (among others).

As early-career information professionals who held temporary positions at the time this study began, we wondered about the experiences of other librarians and archivists in precarious roles. We hoped to better understand the prevalence of temporary librarian and archivist positions in higher education, bring attention to the experience of library information professionals in those roles, and give conversations about this topic a bit more scholarly weight. To help answer some of these questions, we conducted an extensive literature review and fielded a survey of temporary library employees in academia.

Who Is Counted as Temporary?

The literature on this topic varies greatly in defining who counts as a temporary library or archives employee. Job titles for temporary roles include terms such as adjunct, part-time, resident, fellow, project, contingent, fixed-term, time-limited, contract,¹ visiting, substitute, term, and itinerant.² Length of contract for these temporary positions can range from three months to three years. In some cases, temporary positions come with a known expiration date, while others come with the expectation that they may continue indefinitely.

Library scholarship has pointed to temporary employment as a subcategory of precarious labor. The International Labour Organization describes precarious employment by several

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characteristics, including “uncertainty as to the duration of employment...ambiguous employment situation, a lack of access to social protection and benefits usually associated with employment, low pay,” among others.³ In temporary library and archives roles, this precarity often looks like “fewer full-time, permanent hours of work and fewer, if any, employment benefits...”⁴ or employment limited to a “time-bound project” with “restrict[ions] from...certain assignments...”⁵ Job precarity, and accompanying stresses like instability and inequality, appear time and time again in studies of temporary labor both inside and outside of libraries.

The Early Days of Temporary Library Employment

Library scholars have discussed temporary employment in academic libraries since the 1980s. Researchers in early projects frequently observe the prevalence of temporary labor in other industries and the beginning of its use in libraries.⁶ These studies, directed toward supervisors of temporary employees, report that temporary positions benefit supervisors and their libraries because these positions are a cost-effective hiring option when hiring much-needed employees on a more permanent basis is too expensive.⁷

When library supervisors mention negatives to temporary roles, they highlight workplace inequalities like lack of security and feeling unequal and/or undercompensated compared to non-temporary colleagues.⁸ Pontau and Rothschild (1986) additionally note that the temporariness of a position can make it more likely that new employees will face challenges with “orientation, supervision, acceptance and integration, and utilization” in the workplace.⁹

The Temporary Employment Trend Picks Up Steam

By the early 2000s, the literature reflects a growing use of contingent roles like “temporary” or “itinerant” in academic libraries.¹⁰ Falk and Boettcher (2001) and Bell (2006) predict that this hiring trend will continue to increase, paralleling a trend toward temporary hiring in other areas of academia.¹¹

Scholarship begins to highlight the positive aspects of temporary employment for both managers and their employees. Researchers highlight flexibility, a variety of tasks, and new learning opportunities as the main advantages to temporary roles, especially for early career librarians.¹² Perception of temporary positions shifts slightly in the literature from the view that many professionals may want this type of position to supplement their income to the view that temporary roles are a stepping stone to a more permanent and stable position.¹³

Is There a Better Way to Do Temporary Labor?

Since the late 2010s, the discussion around temporary employment has moved toward concerns around precarity and equality. The quantity of gray literature appearing over the past decade or so suggests that the use of temporary librarians and archivists may be increasing, or at least has become a hot topic in library information science (LIS) scholarly communication.¹⁴

The literature has also expanded beyond solely U.S.-based library scholarly venues to include scholarship from archival professionals and Canadian scholars.¹⁵ As this topic has taken on steam, both library and archives professionals have developed best practices for the use of temporary labor.¹⁶ Many of these guidelines respond to concerns about negative impacts of these roles on the employees in these positions and the institutions that employ them. Furthermore, recent library and archives scholarship on temporary labor more frequently features the voices of people in temporary positions rather than those in management roles.¹⁷

Themes of lack of security, unequal compensation or benefits, and feeling unequal to colleagues persist into current day literature.¹⁸ Scholars like Monaghan (2019) have noted that temporary positions are bad for individual employees, institutions, and the LIS profession as a whole.¹⁹ As Bladek (2019) writes, “The literature has consistently documented the fact that contingent librarians do not have access to wages, benefits and profes-

sional development opportunities comparable to those enjoyed by their permanent full-time colleagues.”²⁰

Especially since about 2019, the literature has also included the theme of the harms temporary librarians and archivists suffer in their lives outside of work. Temporary employees delay life decisions, experience uprooting from support people, face the financial strain of relocating, and often encounter significant stress and anxiety during their precarious employment.²¹ Lacey argues that “research has found job precarity to be as harmful to an individual’s health as unemployment, which speaks to its fundamental inequality.”²² Temporary librarians and archivists who receive mentoring, thoughtful supervision, professional development, and clear expectations for their responsibilities and end date tend to have a more positive experience.²³

Temporary positions affect an academic library’s diversity, community culture, and ability to sustain long-term initiatives. In their 2018 statement in support of temporary archivists at the University of California, Los Angeles, the board of the Society of California Archivists describes the harm temporary positions can cause to both diversity in the profession and the institutional effectiveness of organizations using temporary employees, saying:

The poor prospects for permanent and stable employment directly contributes to a lack of diversity amongst our colleagues, discouraging entry into our profession and driving qualified archivists to seek employment in other fields...the use of temporary labor...deprives repositories of valuable institutional memory, and diverts precious resources to recruitment and training.²⁴

Institutions do not necessarily get the most value out of temporary employment. As Samano (2024) explains, “It’s hard to fully immerse myself in a job that is not permanent because of the fact that it’s not fully committed to me so why should I fully commit to it?”²⁵

Although contemporary LIS literature tends to paint a more negative picture of temporary employment, it is important to keep in mind that the experience of temporary labor differs for everyone. McNiff and Carter (2022) summarize this idea well:

There is no singular story of contract academic librarian work. Some of our participants derived satisfaction and confidence from their contract experiences, while others felt stressed, excluded, overworked, undervalued, and prevented from making life decisions. And many felt all these things at the same time, meaning that contract academic librarians are caught in a difficult set of competing structural and emotional experiences.²⁶

Temporary Labor Research Moving Forward

Existing scholarship on temporary library and archives work cannot give a holistic sense of how extensively this labor practice is used. Researcher surveys are rarely large in scale, often focusing on only one region or professional organization. On the other hand, statistics maintained by professional associations in libraries, archives, and higher education (ACRL, ARL, SAA, and IPEDS, to name a few) do not formally and consistently count these positions when surveying their membership(s). Temporary employees are counted the same as other full-time employees in some survey tools; in others, they are not counted at all.

Additionally, library and archives professionals tend to evaluate temporary labor individually. This is unfortunate, as librarians and archivists frequently experience the same challenges as temporary employees and could learn a lot from each others’ experiences.

Only a portion of the literature on the subject of temporary library and archives employment expresses some kind of positionality.²⁷ When positionality is noted, authors of the more scholarly literature tend to be managers in more permanent roles, while temporary employees most often share their experiences via conference presentations or blog posts. We sought to address these gaps in the scholarship with our study.

Methodology

From October to November 2023, we fielded a survey of academic librarians and archivists with a MLIS or equivalent degree at United States-based institutions who currently hold or previously held temporary positions of less than three years. The study Mayo and Whitehurst (2012) conducted of academic librarians in temporary roles served as a guideline for the creation of our survey instrument (see Appendix A).²⁸

Our survey had three main components: demographic questions about the institutions that hire temporary library professionals; self-assessment questions about how temporary position benefits and responsibilities compare to those of non-temporary colleagues; and open-response questions about overall takeaways, positive and negative, regarding time in temporary roles. To protect participants' privacy, the survey asked for minimal personal identification information. We shared the survey instrument via several library information science professional listservs and social media groups, with the hope that disseminating the study in those locations would reach a large number of both current and former visiting librarians (see Appendix B).

88 participants responded to the survey in some form. The removal of 22 responses that either did not consent to, complete, or meet the inclusion criteria for the study brought us to 66 total participants. After standardizing responses in OpenRefine, we counted descriptive statistics from the quantitative questions and then grouped and coded responses to the open-ended questions according to major themes.

The Landscape of Temporary Employment

Many of the questions in our study centered around who offers temporary library positions and who fills those roles.

Responses revealed that between 2000 and 2023, academic libraries of all four-year institution types and in all U.S. regions offered temporary positions.²⁹ These positions represent a wide variety of types of temporary labor, from grant-funded positions to special project roles or residencies (see Figure 1).

Temporary employees are likely to be early-career professionals, although more experienced individuals do still work in temporary positions. 74% of respondents answered that they had been in the LIS profession for

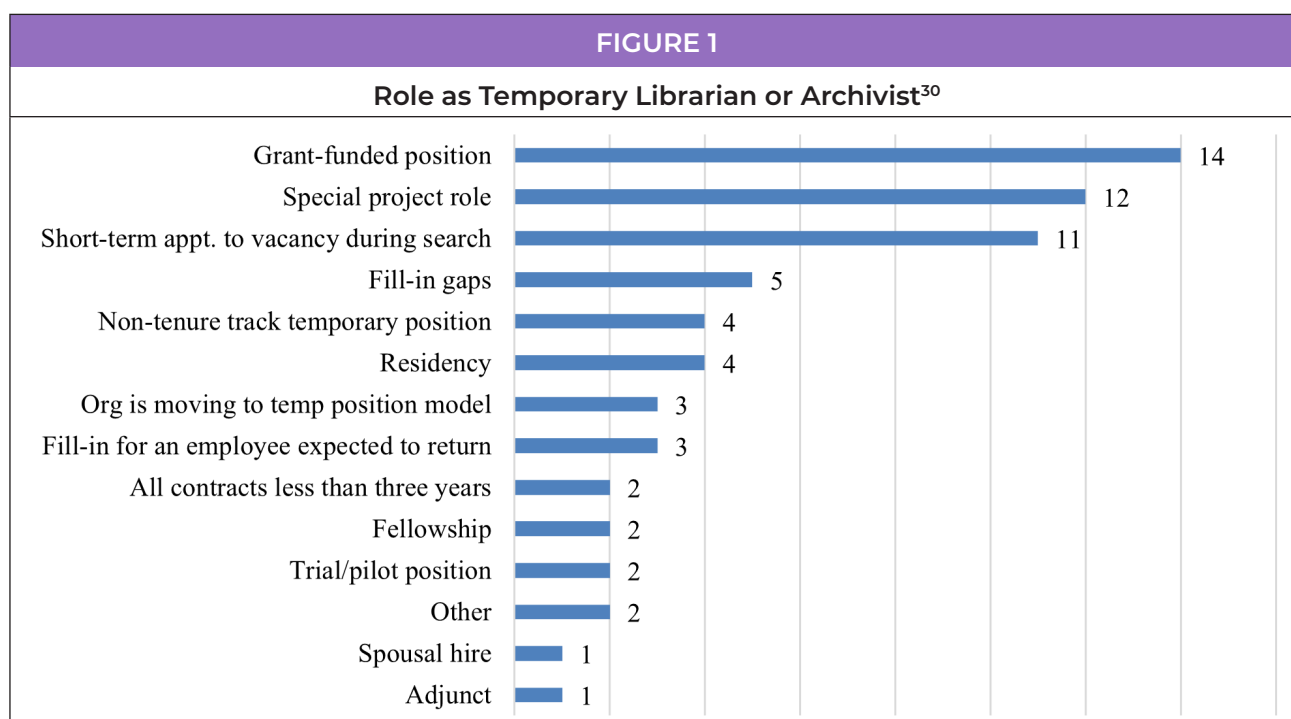


TABLE 1		
Respondents by Age (n=66)		
Age	Percentage of Respondents	Count of Respondents
<20	0%	0
20-29	47%	31
30-39	36%	24
40-49	12%	8
50-59	5%	3
60+	0%	0

TABLE 2		
Respondents by Years in Profession at Time of Temporary Role (n=66)		
Years in the Profession	Percentage of Respondents	Count of Respondents
0-3	74.2%	49
4-6	10.6%	7
7-9	6.1%	4
10+	9.1%	6

three years or less at the time that they accepted a temporary library or archives role. It is also interesting to note that time in the LIS profession had a stronger correlation with temporary employment than age did (see Tables 1 and 2). 49 of 66 respondents had worked in the LIS profession for three years or less when they started their temporary position, while only 31 of 66 respondents were under 30 years of age.

Survey respondents could select multiple areas of library work when identifying where their responsibilities lie. The majority of respondents categorized some of their work as part of Special Collections and Archives responsibilities (62% of all respondents) and/or Research and Instruction responsibilities (44%).³¹ At least one respondent selected each other area of work (Access Services and Outreach; Administrative; and Technical Services) and several volunteered alternative departments (Web IT, Collections and Instruction, Scholarly Communication, Digital Humanities, etc.) by selecting “Other.”

Benefits and Responsibilities Compared to Colleagues

Several questions in the study involved temporary employees’ perceptions of the equality between the benefits and responsibilities of their positions and similar elements of their permanent colleagues’ roles. Respondents had the choice to respond to each question with the answer “Yes,” “No,” “I Don’t Know,” “Sometimes,” or “Not Applicable (N/A).”

While temporary employees felt some aspects of temporary jobs equaled those of permanent employees (i.e. Educational Qualifications, Benefits), other aspects were clearly very different (Salary and Research or Scholarship Expectations). Both salary and research expectations were perceived to be significantly lower than those afforded to permanent librarians and archivists (see Table 3).

The remaining comparable job elements had a wider range of responses. Just over half of respondents perceived that their responsibilities, opportunities for professional development and service, and the hiring process they experienced equaled these elements for permanent employees. On the other hand, one third of respondents indicated that these four job elements clearly differed from colleagues.

Participants who answered anything other than “Yes” to a comparable job aspect question were given the opportunity to share the differences they noticed. Some themes that emerged from these open-ended responses included:

- Responsibilities: less defined job responsibilities or very focused work on only one area or project;
- Professional Development and Service: fewer or no service requirements, limited to certain kinds of service or continuing education (usually internal to the library);
- Research and Scholarship Expectations: often not expected or required of temporary employees; if expected, amount unclear;

TABLE 3										
Percent of Respondents Who Perceive Certain Benefits and Responsibilities to be Comparable with Permanent Colleagues (n=66)										
	Percent Yes	Count Yes	Percent No	Count No	Percent I Don't Know	Count I Don't Know	Percent Sometimes	Count Sometimes	Percent N/A	Count N/A
Educational Qualifications	90.9%	60	1.5%	1	4.5%	3	3.0%	2	0.0%	0
Benefits	80.3%	53	13.6%	9	3.0%	2	1.5%	1	1.5%	1
Responsibilities	65.2%	43	28.8%	19	1.5%	1	1.5%	1	1.5%	1
Professional Development	59.1%	39	31.8%	21	1.5%	1	0.0%	0	3.0%	2
Service	57.6%	38	34.8%	23	6.1%	4	0.0%	0	1.5%	1
Hiring Process	51.5%	34	18.2%	12	16.7%	11	13.6%	9	1.5%	1
Research/Scholarship Expectations	42.4%	28	39.4%	26	13.6%	9	1.5%	1	3.0%	2
Salary	33.3%	22	43.9%	29	21.2%	14	0.0%	0	1.5%	1

- Salary: for those who answered “No,” unanimously lower pay than permanent colleagues, ranging from descriptions like “a bit less” to “probably about \$20-30,000 less;”
- Hiring Process: generally the process is shortened, and treated more like a staff hire than a faculty hire;

While benefits were an area where we expected to see quite a difference, there was not as much variation. Instead, respondents noted considerable parity in benefits and hiring process, and more disparity between the salary, service and research expectations, and responsibilities.

Where Are They Now?

Repeat Temporary Roles

The number of people who indicated in the survey that they had held more than one temporary role surprised and alarmed us. 29 respondents (44%) have held more than one temporary position during their career, some working multiple term roles in succession and others taking multiple temporary roles at the same time. Although we acknowledged the possibility of a single employee having held multiple temporary roles in the survey instrument, the survey asked participants to only answer based on their most recent experience in a temporary position.

Uncertainty of Job Renewal

When employees hold a temporary position, there is often great uncertainty about the end of the contract and whether there is any possibility of that position being renewed for another term or made permanent. A plurality of respondents (45%) to our survey answered “Maybe” to the question “Did you or do you think that your contract would be renewed, extended, or transformed to non-temporary?” while the remainder of responses were split fairly evenly between “Yes” (29%) and “No” (26%). This speaks to a notable lack of clarity between employees and their workplaces about job security, making it difficult for temporary librarians and archivists to make long-term plans within both their work and personal lives.

Moreover, respondents not only expressed uncertainty about the possibility of temporary contract renewal but also about what the conditions for renewal or permanence would be. Most participants (45%) noted that they were not asked to meet any conditions for renewal of their temporary positions, with just over half of remaining participants (28%) responding that they did not know if they would need to meet any renewal conditions.

Future Career Direction

Beyond asking participants about their perceptions of temporary employment, the survey also gathered data about the direction of their career following their temporary position. 35 respondents (53%) answered that they were still employed at the library where they worked as a temporary librarian or archivist. 24 of those respondents (69%) were still working in a temporary capacity, while 11 (31%) had moved on to more permanent roles in their institutions.³²

For those no longer employed at the same institution (47%), we asked them to describe the field where they now work. 28 (90%) of those respondents were still employed in a gallery, library, archive, or museum (GLAM), higher education institution, or both.³³ The remaining three (10%) participants had either moved to a position in a different industry or left the workforce.

Positive Aspects of Temporary Employment

The most impactful data collected in the survey came from responses to the three open-ended questions. Participants first reflected on what they perceived as the more positive aspects of their temporary position. Three key themes emerged from their responses: professional experience, flexibility, and the opportunity to make connections and learn new things.

Professional Experience

Most respondents expressed positive feelings about the ability to gain some professional experience in library work through a temporary position. 23 participants appreciated the way their temporary role built skills and job experience for future work, and 13 participants valued their temporary jobs for the “foot in the door” they provided at an institution or in the library profession as a whole. One respondent remarked:

It was a good early-career ‘foot in the door’ position. Without any previous professional experience, I would never have been hired for the permanent version of that position. It allowed me to be able to be hired for something more permanent when the time came to move on. I am able to network and add to my work experience while I look for something more stable.

Flexibility

The flexibility that temporary jobs offer to employees (14 participants) and subsequent ability to leave a job if needed (13 participants) were also perceived as benefits by many respondents. One participant summarized several kinds of flexibility that temporary roles offer:

Allowed me to not have [a] gap in employment on my resume. Gave me a chance to work in a different organization with different leadership and aims from my previous position. Allowed me some flexibility with my homelife as I wasn’t sure I wanted full-time, permanent work and I was able to try out full-time work (ultimately wanted part-time).

Opportunity to Make Connections and Learn New Things

Though not mentioned as often, multiple respondents remarked positively about the opportunities their temporary positions gave them to learn, to make connections, and to try new things. One respondent, who completed a fellowship after graduation from library school, commented that “I had close mentoring and supervision... [It] allowed me to build my skills and confidence for an entry-level position.”

Yet, when asked about advantages to temporary employment, some participants stated only the role “was a job” (8) or that there were no discernible positives (7). When asked about the more positive aspects of their temporary position, the words of one respondent say it all: “Hard to see any, honestly. It sucked.”

Negative Aspects of Temporary Employment

Responses to the open-ended questions in the survey skewed more negative than positive. Comments highlighted the instability and inequality that temporary employees feel in both their professional and personal lives, remarking on the disparity they experience between the benefits and impacts of their positions compared to those of more permanent colleagues. We grouped responses to our open-ended question about the more negative aspects of temporary employment according to four overarching themes: professional instability, professional inequality, personal instability, and personal inequality.

Professional Instability

Professional instability was the theme that resonated most with participants. This theme included responses where participants experienced uncertainty about their role and their future in the workplace. Examples of these experiences include: their role not being communicated well; an unclear hiring process; having to keep a continuous eye on the job market; limits to career advancement; the feeling of being “at the whim of the institution;” loss of institutional knowledge; and unfulfilled hope of a permanent position. One participant candidly expressed how quickly a temporary role can feel unstable and some of the consequences this can have on one’s work:

I was already thinking about my next job search three months into the position because of how hard it can be to find work. Even though I was supposed to do service and scholarship as a faculty member it is hard to do on a one year temporary contract...

Professional Inequality

Professional inequality encompasses responses where participants experience less support and resources compared to their more permanent counterparts. Examples include: lack of networking opportunities; limits of their contribution to the workplace (service); having too many responsibilities tied to their position(s); the time pressure associated with temporary roles; feeling less supported by the institution and/or their supervisor; feeling inferior to permanent colleagues; inferior pay; and feeling that they are not valued in their profession or workplace.

Respondents repeatedly voiced their frustrations with parts of their job they felt were not equal to the experiences of their more permanent colleagues. One response highlights many of the professional inequalities that happen within temporary labor: “Insecurity, low pay, being expected to do the same work as permanent librarians. Feeling somewhat like an outsider— even if your coworkers are great, you always know this might be temporary.” A second participant reflected that “it was incredibly frustrating to see others do the same work as me but not have to deal with precarity of employment... people occasionally said insensitive things.”

Personal Instability

Temporary positions affect temporary employees in many areas of life outside of their work or career, especially their sense of security and ability to plan for the future. Examples of this theme include: specific mentions of stress, anxiety, uncertainty, and insecurity in their personal lives; feeling like their life is on hold; fear of unemployment; and the unfulfilled hope of a permanent position. Respondents listed a myriad of impacts their temporary positions had on their ability to build community and make long-term decisions. One respondent illustrates this point well:

The stress and worry you feel about where you’re going to be next year, and the inability to make long-term or big life decisions (like buying property, getting married, having kids, having life-changing medical procedures...) is INCREDIBLY DRAINING.

Personal Inequality

Finally, personal inequality comprises many of the financial and emotional burdens temporary employees experience. Examples include: inadequate pay; lack of support for moving expenses; paying their own professional development costs; feeling pressure to be grateful for a salary and job; feeling underemployed; and feeling that they are not valued in their profession or workplace. One respondent highlighted the economic challenges a temporary employee may face in a lower paid role, noting:

Everyone is spread so thin and with no professional development budget, and very limited opportunities, I feel like my institution is unwilling to invest in me. My pay is also a poverty wage for [my region]. I have applied for food assistance, but I think I will be denied because I make just slightly too much...

What Temporary Employees Want The Broader LIS Field to Know

Our third open-ended question, “What would you like others in the broader LIS community to know about your experience as a temporary librarian or archivist?” sought to collect the overall takeaways that current or former temporary employees have from their experience in these roles in their own voices. We hoped to offer a space for anything they wished to share that we may not have anticipated when planning the study.

When analyzing responses to this question, we considered the content and the general sentiment of their responses. Almost half of the responses (46%) mentioned both positives and negatives, with many others listing only negatives (36%). A few responses had a more positive (10%) or even indifferent tone (8%).

Some of the themes identified overlapped with those in responses to earlier open-ended questions, while others were new. Participants again mentioned professional and personal instability; feelings of inferiority; stress; and gaining professional experiences or networks. One respondent reflected, “...I could have accomplished so much more—and been so happier, healthier, and active within the professional community—if I’d been able to work from a place of stability and sufficient resources.” Similarly, a separate respondent expressed frustration with the sacrifices their temporary role required: “It literally forces you to put your life on hold. How can you plan for your future, not only of your career but of your personal life, when you don’t know where you’ll be living and working in 2 years? I feel like I lost two years of my life.”

This question also brought up reflections on the impact temporary positions have on institutions and the wider profession. Multiple participants expressed worries about the limits of an employee's contribution and the institution's effectiveness with temporary hires. Additionally, respondents did not think that temporary roles are diverse, equitable, inclusive, or accessible enough, failing to sufficiently break down barriers to entering the field for historically marginalized communities. Both of these concerns are exemplified by one respondent's comment:

Temporary positions hurt everyone. The institution doesn't get the most out of the employee by limiting their contribution and the employee who cannot use the employment as a stepping stone to a permanent position loses income and peace of mind...Temporary positions do not repair inequity.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

There are a few limitations to this research project that warrant further discussion. In an effort to respect the privacy of our participants, we did not ask certain demographic questions (name, institution, race, ethnicity, contact information). We hope that this decision protected participants in the study and encouraged more honest responses from a population who might be more at risk were they to share this honest feedback with their employer(s) directly. However, restricting the biographical and contact information collected by the survey affected our ability to later follow up with participants or obtain a full picture of temporary employment demographics. The sampling method used to recruit participants did not allow us to answer questions like whether temporary labor increased or decreased over time or know if our sample is truly representative of the entire temporary library employee population. Since we asked questions from a diverse population of temporary librarians and archivists, we were unable to determine any particular trends within types of temporary role (project archivist, library resident, etc.).

This project revealed three areas for future research. Further work should be done to study multiple temporary positions held by one employee, the prevalence of temporary archivist and instruction librarian roles specifically, and the mental health impacts of temporary library and archives work. All of these topics appeared as major themes from our survey, but we did not ask enough about them to analyze them extensively with the data we have. We are curious about these themes and hope that researchers will continue to explore these important questions.

Concluding Thoughts

As McNiff and Carter (2022) acknowledge, there is no one story of temporary library employment. In the words of one of our participants, "it may or may not work out to take a temp position." The demographic data in our survey indicate that temporary employment is a widespread trend in archives and libraries within higher education. Some people have a very rewarding experience as a temporary employee, but as the practice stands, there is more negative sentiment than positive. Even those who have no regrets about taking a temporary appointment feel that they "got lucky" and could have fared worse. Most employees experience a mix of positive and negative elements within their temporary roles, appreciating time to grow into their careers as librarians or archivists while also finding their time in these positions stressful and uncertain.

When temporary roles are good, they tend to provide a springboard to future career opportunities. Residencies and fellowships often stand out as good examples of positive temporary labor because they are purpose-built for people new to the profession. Positive temporary positions include elements such as clearly defined responsibilities, fair pay, mentoring and networking, professional development, and clarity about when and how the job will end.

Creating a well-functioning temporary position is not easy. Good temporary roles require intention and forethought to work well for both employer and employee. Moreover, permanent staffing needs should not be filled by temporary employees in the long term. One respondent, an archivist, summarizes this concern well, stating “...temporary positions that involve preservation...are contradictory— you cannot preserve material in perpetuity if you are not committed to retaining the actual humans doing the work.” The same thing can be said for efforts to diversify the profession through temporary labor.

It is also vital that librarians and archivists know the pros and cons of temporary employment and what it looks like in their specific context(s). As one respondent put it, “...visiting positions can really vary in support and benefits, so I would just recommend really understanding everything about the position, the benefits, the salary, the work environment, etc.” Employees who are unprepared for the realities of temporary employment may have unrealistic expectations about what they can accomplish during that position or about the likelihood of their position being renewed. This can lead to more difficulty transitioning into or out of a temporary role or feelings of greater anxiety or frustration if a more permanent role is not possible.

Alternatively, those who are in a position where they can intentionally take on a more precarious employment opportunity or who receive clear expectations about their responsibilities and career trajectory as a temporary employee are more likely to have a good experience. Another participant’s response exemplifies this idea well: “If you are at a place in your life where you can be in a more precarious position... it can be a great way to get your foot in the door, but it was also extremely stressful.”

It is probable, with budget constraints and evolving needs, that academic libraries will continue to hire librarians and archivists in temporary capacities for years to come. Given this reality, the LIS profession should work to ensure that temporary employment improves for both the people in these roles and the institutions themselves. Libraries should think strategically about temporary positions with goals like cultivating institutional knowledge, building a welcoming and supportive environment for all employees, offering more equitable pay, and establishing clear expectations for all involved. Best practices and the perspectives of current or former temporary employees can serve as tools to help academic libraries work towards these objectives.³⁴ Hopefully, with these changes, temporary positions will “work out” for more people than they do right now.

Appendix A. Temporary Librarian/ Archivist Survey Instrument

This consent form may contain terms that you do not understand. Please contact the study staff with questions so that they may explain any unclear terminology.

Purpose of this study: This study seeks to understand the experiences of temporary librarians and archivists in higher education. A “temporary librarian or archivist” is a library professional who: holds full-time status in an academic library or archives; has received an MLIS or equivalent library/archival professional degree; often must meet the same qualifications and responsibilities as their more permanent counterparts; and has a temporary contract of less than three years. This project follows other studies on the benefits and disadvantages of temporary library employment, but aims to revitalize the conversation around this topic.

This survey should take approximately 15 minutes. If you have questions at any time, please contact one of the study investigators.

Description of the study and your involvement: If you decide to participate in the research study after reading this consent form, please check “Yes, I consent to participate in this study” below. You may also request a copy of this consent form at any time. Following your consent to join this project, you will complete a survey asking about your experience as a temporary librarian or archivist. In some cases, we may ask you questions regarding your behavior and identity.

Risks and discomforts: The risks of this survey are not greater than the risks associated with daily living. You will give your opinions to a short questionnaire. If any of the questions make you uncomfortable and you do not wish to answer them, you may skip them or decline to participate in the rest of the survey. If you have additional feedback or questions, you may reach out to the study investigators.

Benefits to you and others: We hope to bring greater attention to this trend in higher education by publishing the results of this study in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal and/or presenting at a major professional conference. This project will likely increase conversation around this topic and improve collective understanding of the experiences of temporary visiting library professionals.

Costs: There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend on the tasks.

Alternatives: The alternative is to not participate in the study.

Confidentiality: Data will be collected only for research purposes and aggregated before analysis. Our findings from this study may be presented at conferences or published in papers, but will not be shared outside of these contexts; however, information from this project and your signed consent form may be reviewed or copied for research or legal purposes by Hope College. The total number of prospective participants from this study is between 50-100.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal: You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study.

Questions: In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, contact:

Jenny Bruxvoort, Van Wylen Library, Hope College: bruxvoort@hope.edu

Sarah Lundy, Van Wylen Library, Hope College: lundys@hope.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study (Protocol # 22-043), you may contact: Brian Rider, Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board, Hope College, Holland, MI 49422, hsrb@hope.edu.

Consent

I understand that this study has been approved by the Hope College Human Subjects Review Board. I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My consent below indicates that I am willing to participate in this study. I have been offered a copy of the consent form. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time.

* Indicates required question

1. Do you consent to be part of this study? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, I consent to be a part of this study
- No, I do not consent to be a part of this study

2. Today's Date *

Example: January 7, 2019

Temporary Library or Archives Status

3. Are you or have you ever been in a temporary library position (defined as holding a contract of less than three years)? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

4. Have you held more than one temporary library or archives position?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes *Skip to section 3 (A Note on Multiple Temporary Positions)*
- No *Skip to question 5*

A Note on Multiple Temporary Positions

For the remainder of this survey, please answer questions with your most recent temporary academic library position in mind.

Temporary Librarian or Archivist Status

Note: This survey is focusing on full-time temporary library positions that require an LIS or equivalent degree in US-based higher education institutions. We acknowledge that there are many other kinds of precarious labor in LIS organizations and hope that these too will be the subject of other future research studies.

5. In this temporary position, was or is a Masters degree in Library Science or a related field a job requirement? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

Other: _____

6. Was or is it a full-time or part-time position? *

Mark only one oval.

- Full-time
- Part-time

Other: _____

7. Was or is your temporary library role at a US-based college or university? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

Temporary Position Specifics

8. When did you start this temporary position?

Example: January 7, 2019

9. What was or is the length of your original temporary contract (in months)?

10. What type of institution did or do you work for in your temporary role?

Mark only one oval.

- 2-year institution
- 4-year public, research-focused institution
- 4-year public, teaching-focused institution
- 4-year private, research-focused institution
- 4-year private, teaching-focused institution
- Other: _____

11. In what region was or is your workplace located?

Mark only one oval.

- Northeast: New England (ME, NH, VT, MA, CT, RI)
- Northeast: Middle Atlantic (NY, PA, NJ)
- Midwest: East North Central (WI, IL, IN, MI, OH)
- Midwest: West North Central (ND, SD, NE, KS, MN, IA, MO)
- South: South Atlantic (DE, MD, WV, DC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL)
- South: East South Central (KY, TN, MS, AL)
- South: West South Central (AR, LA, OK, TX)
- West: Mountain (ID, MT, WY, NV, UT, CO, AZ, NM)
- West: Pacific (WA, OR, CA, AK, HI)

12. How long had you been in the LIS professions when you started this temporary position?

Mark only one oval.

- 0-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-9 years
- 10+ years

13. How old were you at the start of your temporary position?

Mark only one oval.

- <20
- 20-29

- o 30-39
- o 40-49
- o 50-59
- o 60+

14. Which of these options best defines your role as a temporary librarian or archivist?

Mark only one oval.

- o All professional library or archives roles at this institution have contracts of less than three years
- o Fellowship
- o Fill-in for an employee expected to return
- o Grant-funded position
- o Residency
- o Short-term appointment to a vacant library position during search for permanent replacement
- o Special project role
- o Other: _____

15. Which area of the library work best describes your work responsibilities? Check all that apply (multiple answers permitted)

Check all that apply.

- Access Services and Outreach
- Administrative
- Research and Instruction
- Special Collections and Archives
- Technical Services
- Other: _____

Temporary Librarian Benefits and Responsibilities

16. To the best of your knowledge, how many others at your library institution held temporary librarian or archivist positions **when you started working there**?

17. To the best of your knowledge, how many others at your library institution hold temporary librarian or archivist positions **now**?

18. To the best of your knowledge, have others held temporary librarian or archivist positions at your library in the last ten years?

Mark only one oval.

- o Yes
- o No
- o I don't know

19. If yes, how many?

20. Are or were your benefits the same as non-temporary librarians or archivists?

Mark only one oval.

- o Yes
- o No
- o I don't know
- o Other: _____

21. If no, what are the differences?

22. Are or were your responsibilities as a temporary librarian or archivist the same as your non-temporary colleagues?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Other: _____

23. If no, what are the differences?

24. Are or were your service expectations to the library or institution the same as your non-temporary colleagues?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I Don't Know
- Other: _____

25. If no, what are the differences?

26. Are or were your research/scholarship expectations to the same as your nontemporary colleagues?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I Don't Know
- Other: _____

27. If no, what are the differences?

28. Do you or did you benefit from the same professional development opportunities and/or funding as your non-temporary colleagues?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Other: _____

29. If no, what are the differences?

30. Is or was your salary the same (or similar) to non-temporary colleagues?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Other: _____

31. If no, what are the differences?

32. Do temporary librarians and archivists complete the same hiring process?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes

- No
- Sometimes
- I don't know

33. If sometimes or no, what are the differences?

34. Are temporary librarians or archivists expected to have the same educational qualifications as the other librarians or archivists?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- I don't know

35. If sometimes or no, what are the differences?

After Your Temporary Contract

36. Are you still employed at the library you worked at as a temporary librarian or archivist?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

37. If yes, which of these statements best describes your current employment?

Mark only one oval.

- I am still there in a temporary position
- I now work there in a more permanent position

38. If no, which of these statements describe your current employment? Check all that apply.

Check all that apply.

- I still work in higher education
- I still work in a GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, or Museums) institution
- I left the workforce
- I am working in a different industry
- I am currently pursuing further education
- Other: _____

39. Were there any conditions for the renewal of your temporary contract (or for your transition to a position with more permanence)?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

40. If yes, what were they?

41. Do you or did you think that your contract would be renewed, extended, or transformed to non-temporary?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Your Experiences as a Temporary Librarian or Archivist

42. What do or did you see as the more positive aspect(s) of holding a temporary librarian or archivist position? *

43. What do or did you see as the more negative aspect(s) of holding a temporary librarian or archivist position? *

44. What would you want others in the broader LIS community to know about your experience as a temporary librarian or archivist? *

Demographics

45. Which most closely describes your gender?

Check all that apply.

- Woman
- Man
- Transgender
- Non-Binary Agender/I don't identify with any gender
- Prefer Not to State
- Other: _____

Appendix B. Survey Distribution Venues

Association of College & Research Libraries Listservs

- College Libraries Section
- University Libraries Section
- Rare Books and Manuscripts Section
- Residencies Interest Group

American Library Association Listserv

- New Members Round Table

Society of American Archivists Listservs

- College & University Archives
- Students and New Archival Professionals

The Oberlin Library Consortium Listserv

- Oberlin Listserv

Social Media

- Facebook: Library Think Tank #ALATT
- BlueSky: Skybrarians and GLAM

Our Own Graduate Library Programs' Alumni Networks

- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign: iSchool Alumni Connections Facebook Group
- University of Michigan: School of Information ALL Listserv

Notes

1. There is some debate among library labor scholars about whether or not "contract" positions should be grouped with other temporary labor due to their greater likelihood of renewal and long-term stability. See Janet L. Mayo and Angela P. Whitehurst, "Temporary Librarians in Academe: Current Use, Future Considerations," *Reference Services Review* 40, no. 3 (2012): 512-524, <https://doi.org/10.1108/00907321211254724>; Sajni Lacey, "Job Precarity, Contract Work, and Self-Care," *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 14, no. 1 (2019): 1-8, <https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/perj/article/view/5212>; Lindsey McNiff and Nicole Carter, "Contract Academic Librarians in Canada: Stories from a Nation-Wide Survey," *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship* 8 (2022): 1-31, <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/cjalib/2022-v8-cjalib06816/1095301ar/>.
2. Mayo and Whitehurst, "Temporary Librarians in Academe;" Rosemary K.J. Davis et al., "Grant Cycles, Deadlines, and Labor Advocacy: The Changing Work of Project Archivists," presentation at MARAC 2016, Pittsburgh, PA, April 2016, <http://hdl.handle.net/1903/18102>; Marta Bladek, "Contingent Appointments in Academic Libraries: Management Challenges and Opportunities," *Library Management* 40, no. 8-9 (2019): 485-495, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2307346314/abstract/E382BCBA3D05406EPQ/1?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>; Natalie C. Hill, Laura A. Tadena, and Adriana Cásarez, "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Autonomy and Agency in Term-Limited Library Positions from Residencies" in *Residencies Revisited: Reflections on Library Residency Programs from the Past and Present*, ed. Preethi Gorecki and Arielle Petrovich (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2022), <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/117522>.
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5. Donna Zufan Pontau and M. Cecilia Rothschild, "T is for Temporary," *College & Research Libraries* 47, no. 2 (1986): 150, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.47.02.150>.

6. James S. Chervinko, "Temporary Employees in Academic and Research Libraries," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 12 no. 4 (1986): 220, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ342812>; Donna Z. Pontau, "Temporary Librarians in California Academic Libraries: Results of a State-Wide Survey of Library Directors," *Library Personnel News* 3 (1989): 57-58; Mayo and Whitehurst, "Temporary Librarians in Academe."
7. Chervinko, "Temporary Employees in Academic and Research Libraries;" Pontau and Rothschild, "T is for Temporary;" Pontau, "Temporary Librarians in California Academic Libraries."
8. Chervinko, "Temporary Employees in Academic and Research Libraries;" Pontau and Rothschild, "T is for Temporary;" Pontau, "Temporary Librarians in California Academic Libraries;" Jennifer Johnston, "A Permanent Alternative: Temporary, Part-Time Library Work," *LISCareer.com: Career Strategies for Librarians* (blog), *Internet Archive*, August 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20170727092822/http://www.liscareer.com/johnston_temporary.htm; Mayo and Whitehurst, "Temporary Librarians in Academe."
9. Pontau and Rothschild, "T is for Temporary;" 150.
10. Patricia K. Falk and Bonna J. Boettcher, "Grant-Funded Temporary Employees in Libraries," *Technical Services Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2001): 35-46, https://doi.org/10.1300/J124v18n03_04; Steven Bell, "Is the Itinerant Academic Librarian in Our Future," *ACRLog: Blogging by and for Academic and Research Librarians* (blog), *Association of College and Research Libraries*, December 14, 2006, <https://acrlog.org/2006/12/14/is-the-itinerant-academic-librarian-in-our-future/>.
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12. Falk and Boettcher, "Grant-Funded Temporary Employees in Libraries;" Jennifer Johnston, "A Permanent Alternative: Temporary, Part-Time Library Work;" Bell, "Is the Itinerant Academic Librarian in Our Future;" Mayo and Whitehurst, "Temporary Librarians in Academe;" April Hathcock, "Why Don't You Want to Keep Us?," *At the Intersection* (blog), January 18, 2019, <https://april-hathcock.wordpress.com/2019/01/18/why-dont-you-want-to-keep-us/>; Hill, Tadena, and Cásarez, "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow."
13. Bell, "Is the Itinerant Academic Librarian in Our Future;" Falk and Boettcher, "Grant-Funded Temporary Employees in Libraries;" Jennifer Johnston, "A Permanent Alternative: Temporary, Part-Time Library Work;" Mayo and Whitehurst, "Temporary Librarians in Academe;" Hathcock, "Why Don't You Want to Keep Us?;" Hill, Tadena, and Cásarez, "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow."
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18. Davis et al., "Grant Cycles, Deadlines, and Labor Advocacy;" Temporary Labor Survey Team, "Survey on Temporary Labor: A

- Quick Look," Issues & Advocacy Section Annual Report; Lacey, "Job Precarity, Contract Work, and Self-Care;" Bladdek, "Contingent Appointments in Academic Libraries."
19. Monaghan, "Are Temporary Appointments a Threat to Archiving?"
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 21. Brons et al., "Let's Talk Precarity (or Not): Libraries, Community, and Conversation;" SAA I&A, 2019; Lacey, "Job Precarity, Contract Work, and Self-Care;" Monaghan, "Are Temporary Appointments a Threat to Archiving?;" Hill, Tadena, and Cásarez, "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow;" McNiff and Carter, "Contract Academic Librarians in Canada;" Sayles, "On the Clock: Framing Project Archivist, Internship, and Student Roles as a Manager."
 22. Lacey, "Job Precarity, Contract Work, and Self-Care," 3.
 23. Falk and Boettcher, "Grant-Funded Temporary Employees in Libraries;" Bladdek, "Contingent Appointments in Academic Libraries;" Hill, Tadena, and Cásarez, "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow;" Sayles, "On the Clock: Framing Project Archivist, Internship, and Student Roles as a Manager;" Verkerk, "On the Clock: Long Term Effects of Short Term Positions."
 24. Society of California Archivists, "Statement in Support of Temporary Archivists at UCLA," November 27, 2018, https://calarchivists.org/resources/Documents/Board%20Statement_2018.pdf.
 25. Samano, "On the Clock: Overcoming Prolonged Imposter Syndrome in Temporary Archival Positions."
 26. McNiff and Carter, "Contract Academic Librarians in Canada," 26-27.
 27. Pontau and Rothschild, "T is for Temporary;" Falk and Boettcher, "Grant-Funded Temporary Employees in Libraries;" Davis et al., "Grant Cycles, Deadlines, and Labor Advocacy;" Lacey, "Job Precarity, Contract Work, and Self-Care;" Hill, Tadena, and Cásarez, "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow;" McNiff and Carter, "Contract Academic Librarians in Canada;" Riley, "On the Clock: Term Position Red Flags;" Samano, "On the Clock: Overcoming Prolonged Imposter Syndrome in Temporary Archival Positions;" Amelia Verkerk, "On the Clock: Long Term Effects of Short Term Positions."
 28. Mayo and Whitehurst, "Temporary Librarians in Academe," 522-523.
 29. 23 respondents worked in four-year public research institutions and 16 respondents worked in four-year public teaching institutions, while 16 respondents worked in private research institutions and 11 respondents worked in private teaching institutions. Respondents lived in all U.S. Census Bureau regional divisions, ranging from 1 respondent in the South: West Central division and 15 respondents in the Midwest: East North Central division (our own regional division).
 30. The responses visualized in Figure 1 relate to one of the questions in the "Temporary Position Specifics" section in our survey, "Which of these options best defines your role as a temporary librarian or archivist?"
 31. We used our own institutional structure when designing a question around areas of library work. However, the terminology used by our institution does not neatly match the terms used by the American Library Association, Society of American Archivists, and other professional associations in this field, perhaps leading respondents to choose multiple responses that imperfectly match their position instead of one that better aligns with their responsibilities.
 32. The 24 respondents who indicated that they are still in a temporary role at the same library represent both current temporary employees in their first temporary contract as well as those who have had multiple temporary roles at the same institution. We did not ask participants to specify how many temporary positions they have had in total.
 33. Of those participants, 13 responded that they still work in higher education in a GLAM, with an additional eight still working in higher education (non-GLAM) and seven still working in a GLAM (non-higher education).
 34. See the sources cited in footnote 16 for more detail.