

Library Retirements – What we can expect

Denise M. Davis

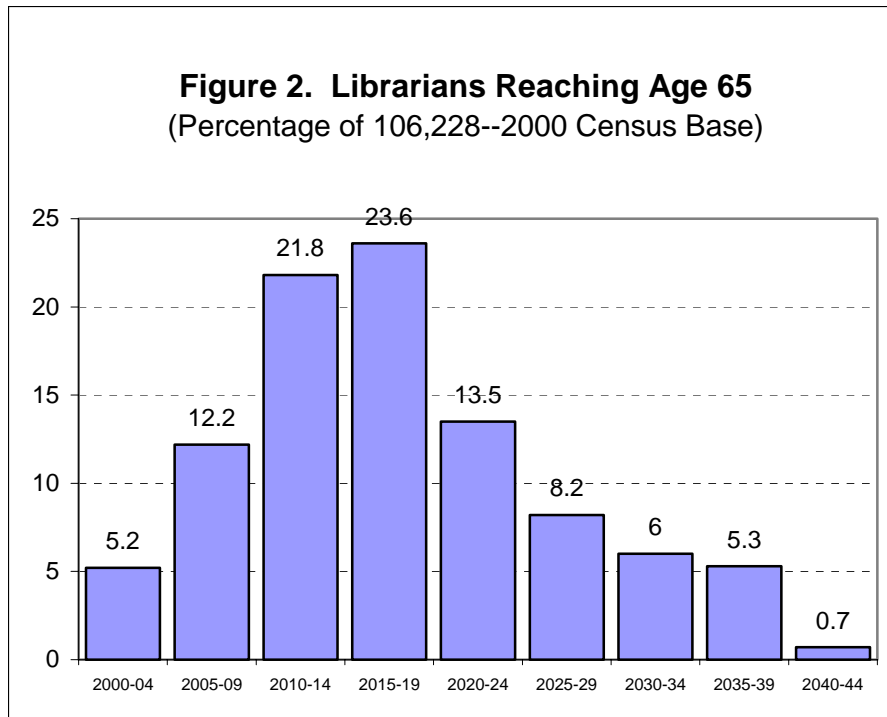
Director, Office for Research & Statistics

American Library Association

In 2004 the American Library Association updated its 2002 study of librarian retirements and the issues of library workforce recruitment.ⁱ Using the 2000 U.S. Census data the researchers (Lynch, Tordello and Godfrey) determined that retirements would be slightly delayed than described in the 2002 study (which used 1990 Census data), but with that delay more librarians would be eligible to retire (more would be age 65 or older). Figure 1 replicates a table from the 2004 study presenting retirement intervals for those individuals self-reporting as Librarian. Figure 2 is from a presentation made by Stephen Tordello to the Special Libraries Association at its annual conference in June 2005.ⁱⁱ The greatest estimated retirement wave occurs between 2010-2020, creating a potential deficit of LIS graduates between 2015-2019.

Figure 1.

Number of Librarians Reaching Age 65 (2000 Census Base)	
Time Period	Number
2000-04	5,479
2005-09	12,898
2010-14	23,208
2015-19	25,014
2020-24	14,400
2025-29	8,674
2030-34	6,517
2035-39	5,544
2040-44	691



Looking at LIS graduation rates from accredited U.S. institutions, we see that the rate of graduation is/is not keeping pace with the potential retirements. Figure 3 presents a comparison of graduation figures and retirement estimates. Estimated retirements outpace LIS graduations in the U.S., even accounting for the reduced growth in professional level library staffing in public and academic libraries. We know that LIS programs attract a large number of second-career individuals, and it is reasonable to estimate that the average age of an LIS graduate is 30-35 years of age. Based on this assumption, and using the Census projections of estimated retirements (at the age of 65), subtracting retired staff from graduation rates yields the data appearing in the last column in Figure 3.

The potential net loss to retirement of LIS graduates from the period 1985-1989 is 4,868. If these estimates are reliable, we begin to see a surplus of graduates to retirements in 2019. And, it may take until 2023 before we recover the loss due to the estimated retirements. The average annual graduation rate for the period 1980-2002 is 5,085. The issue isn't having LIS graduates in the marketplace, the issue becomes having qualified librarians to promote into the positions vacated due to retirement. If this is the case, we could have a recovery period of as much as 8 years.

Figure 3. U.S. LIS Program Graduation Rates and Estimated Retirements

<i>Year</i>	<i>Academic & Public Library MLS Positions</i>	<i>USDE</i>	<i>Graduation Net Change</i>	<i>Estimated Retirement Year</i>	<i>Estimated Retirement (Census Bureau)</i>	<i>Graduation Retirement Gap (all MLS)</i>
		<i>All master's degrees</i>				
1980-81	61,536	4,859		2010-11	4,642	217
1985-86		3,564	-1,295	2015-16	5,003	-1,439
1986-87		3,783	219	2016-17	5,003	-1,220
1987-88		3,674	-109	2017-18	5,003	-1,329
1988-89		3,906	232	2018-19	5,003	-1,097
1989-90	59,269	4,341	435	2019-20	3,505	836
1990-91	60,423	4,763	422	2020-21	2,880	1,883
1991-92	60,827	4,893	130	2021-22	2,880	2,013
1992-93		4,871	-22	2022-23	2,880	1,991
1993-94	64,079	5,116	245	2023-24	2,880	2,236
1994-95		5,057	-59	2024-25	2,308	2,749
1995-96	65,962	5,099	42	2026-27	1,735	3,364
1996-97		4,982	-117	2028-29	1,735	3,247
1997-98	70,201	4,871	-111	2029-30	1,735	3,136
1998-99		4,752	-119	2030-31	1,519	3,233
1999-00	72,788	4,577	-175	2031-32	1,303	3,274
2000-01*		4,727	150	2032-33	1,303	3,424
2001-02		5,113	386	2033-34	1,303	3,810

MLS positions as reported by NCES in the Academic and Federal State Cooperative System surveys for the fiscal years indicated. Academic data reported biennially. NCES did not report staffing data between 1983-1988.

1980-2002 graduation data are actual (<http://www.ala.org/ala/hrdr/educprofdev/lisdegreesawarded.htm>)

Retirement estimates are based on the 5-year Census estimates divided evenly for the period, and comparison assumes graduation age of 35 years.

Although this comparison does not estimate growth in the numbers of libraries, nor the numbers of available professional positions, it does raise questions about staff shortages at the librarian level.

ⁱ Lynch, Mary Jo, Tordello, Stephen, and Thomas Godfrey. *Retirement & Recruitment: A Deeper Look*. *American Libraries*. 36(1) (January 2005): 26. Study details are available at <http://www.ala.org/ala/ors/reports/recruitretire/recruitretire-a-deeperlook.pdf> and <http://www.ala.org/ala/ors/reports/recruitretire/recruitretire-a-deeperlook-figures.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Stephen J. Tordella. Presentation made at the Special Libraries Association conference, Annual Diversity Breakfast. June 2005, Toronto, Canada. Slides are the property of Decision Demographics. Arlington, VA 22204.