

## **Retirement & Recruitment: A Deeper Look**

**By Mary Jo Lynch, Former Director, ALA Office for Research & Statistics and  
Stephen Tordella, President, Decision Demographics  
Thomas Godfrey, Senior Demographer, Decision Demographics**

*American Libraries* sounded an alarm with the March 2002 article entitled “Reaching 65: Lots of Librarians Will Be There Soon.” This article has been used heavily to support recruitment efforts, most notably in the argument for legislation that gave IMLS \$10 million in 2003 to spend on recruitment projects. In March of 2002 the latest information for this type of analysis was from the 1990 Census. It is now possible to update that work by analyzing recently-published data files from the 2000 Census. How do the previous findings hold up in the light of ten more years of experience?

The first two figures in this new article are a repeat from the earlier article – except that they are based on the new 2000 Census data. The rest of the article takes a deeper look at the issue of retirement and recruitment by presenting an analysis of “age cohorts” or age groups of librarians that combines Census data from 1990 and 2000. All of the data analyzed and presented in this article are based on the authors’ analysis of the 1990 and 2000 Census Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files. The analysis was supported by a Small Business Innovation Research grant from the National Institute of Health (NIH) to develop software useable for analysis of any occupational group.

In reviewing these new data, it is important to remember that the census labor force information reflects *what employed people say they do*. For example, 197,089 people said they were librarians in the 1990 census, and this figure often was used in articles on the retirement problem. But in working with Decision Demographics on the pilot phase of their NIH project involving the demographics of various occupations, the

ALA learned that only 87,409, or less than half, of those reported librarians had the master's degree or higher. Degrees by discipline are not reported in the decennial census, so we do not know how many have an MLS itself. But possession of a master's degree or above in some field of inquiry seems a reasonable surrogate for the MLS. In 2000, the number of people who said they were librarians and also said they had a master's degree or above had increased to 106,228.

The 1990-based analysis predicted a significant wave of retirement that would peak in the 2010 to 2014 period. Updating the forecast with 2000 Census data, as shown in Figures 1 and 2 predicts a similar retirement surge in the near future. The main difference is that retirements now appear to peak slightly later—between 2015 and 2019. In total, the ten-year period beginning in 2010 will see 45 percent of today's librarians reach age 65. This surge of retirement represents the early-wave of baby boom librarians crossing the threshold of age 65.

In addition to the wave of retirements, several other related trends became evident in our analysis. Between 1990 and 2000 the number of working master's degree librarians grew by 18,819, an increase of nearly 22 percent. Much of this growth came from librarians following a career path that included a late entry or re-entry into the field, a sharp contrast from more traditional pathways to careers, and the pattern was more pronounced with female librarians as shown in figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3 shows the number of female librarians by age in 1990 and 2000. During the 1990s, the number of female librarians grew by 30 percent or 20,202 people--from 67,239 to 87,441. The largest net increase occurred among women in their late thirties and early forties. Of particular note are the 27,469 female librarians age 35-44. A

decade later when they had aged to 45-54, their ranks had swelled to 40,465, a 47 percent increase. A similar pattern was found among the group of female librarians who started off at age 25-34 in 1990 with 7,785 people. By the time they reached age 35-44 in 2000 their numbers had grown to 16,179. This increase of nearly 8,400 more than doubled the size of that group.

Patterns of change among male librarians provide a sharp contrast. The total number and share of male librarians identified in the census dropped over the last decade. In 1990, 20,170, or 23 percent, of librarians were men. By 2000, this had declined to 18,787, accounting for only 18 percent of all librarians. In Figure 4 men display a small tendency toward mid-career entry between when they are 35-44 and 45-54, but it pales in comparison to the women's pattern. On a net basis, men start the library careers earlier and retire or shift careers earlier than women. Among men aged 45-54 in 1990 who aged to 55-64 by 2000, the number of librarians declined 33 percent—presumably because of retirements or field switching. The analogous decline in number of female librarians was only 9 percent.

The net influx of mid-career female librarians, and their later departure from the field, will do little to diminish the retirement surge looming in 2010. It has only served to delay it somewhat. The short-term supply of librarians appears to be bound up with the fate of baby-boom women, while the longer-term health of the field depends on those who follow them. Was the flooding of baby boomers into library science a phenomenon unique to these women or will following generations of women make similar mid-career and mid-life moves?

Part of the answer may lie in how library science, arguably a traditionally female occupation, competes with other opportunities available to women. Perhaps the competitive edge in the broader marketplace is in the ability of women to join the profession mid-career or as a second career. If so, it follows that there should be increased promotion of library science as a mid-life career choice.