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Alternative careers for graduates of LIS schools: The North American perspective – an analysis of the literature

TERRY L. WEECH and ALISON M. KONIECZNY

Schools of Library and Information Science (LIS) have often promoted alternative careers as a marketing tool and some students enrol in LIS schools specifically to explore alternative careers. The literature on LIS career patterns continues to suggest that those non-traditional careers are desirable and viable alternatives. Yet the survey research based literature indicates that very few LIS graduates report finding employment outside traditional libraries in the US and Canada. This paper reviews the challenges of obtaining more accurate information on the career patterns of LIS graduates and discusses the international implications for analysing career patterns for LIS school graduates.

KEYWORDS: library and information education; LIS alternative careers; LIS career patterns; LIS education

INTRODUCTION

For the purposes of this paper, we are using the abbreviation ‘LIS’ to refer to those schools in the United States and Canada, and other countries that have a focus on educating students who will become professional librarians. In the United States and Canada, these are the schools that have Masters degree programmes accredited by the American Library Association. While their names may vary from Schools of Library and Information Science or Graduate Schools of Information Studies, to the briefer Information Schools (I-Schools), they all share the mission of educating professional librarians. But most of these schools also encourage their graduates to seek career alternatives to work in the traditional institution of the library. Yet there seems to be little documentation of the extent to which graduates of these LIS programmes actually find alternative careers once they obtain their LIS degree. This paper will present a review of the literature dealing with library career placement, with a focus on career alternatives to the traditional employment in the library. As educational institutions become more dependent on tuition income and the enrolment numbers to financially support their programmes, determining the actual as well as the potential market for graduates in jobs outside the library becomes more important. It is hoped that this analysis will identify gaps in our current knowledge about alternative careers and provide a guide to future research that might be undertaken to overcome these gaps.

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Alternative careers for graduates of LIS schools is a topic that has appeared regularly in the literature over the past 30 years. A search of Library Literature under the term ‘alternative careers’ yielded 34 hits between 1984 and 8 May 2006. In 1976 Syracuse University held a workshop on alternative careers, with a focus on information brokering and research consulting and publishing (Minor, 1976). A 1984 article in Aslib Proceedings reported that studies suggest that between a third to half of the library profession would embrace an alternative career (Slater, 1984).

What constitutes an alternative career does vary with the orientation of the investigator but it usually is a career that takes the information professional outside the traditional library organization. This has sometimes been referred to as the ‘deinstitutionalization’ of LIS education. This paper will review the literature on the subject of LIS career patterns, focusing on the United States and Canada, as well as several countries with recognized programmes in library and information science education that have applicable literature on the topic of alternative careers.

This literature review is not considered exhaustive. In the case of the United States and Canada, the focus will be on graduates from American Library Association (ALA) accredited Masters degree programmes. Special attention will be paid to data relating to employment in non-traditional, alternative careers to the traditional professional library position or jobs with library vendors that directly serve libraries. A special effort is made to determine the extent to which survey data supports the anecdotal reports of increasing interest and opportunities for LIS graduates to find alternative careers with their LIS degrees.

There have been numerous attempts to define alternative careers to the traditional LIS professional position. One of the more extensive was undertaken by Horton (1994; 8). He attempts to list various areas where alternative careers for librarians might be found, but he avoids, as do most authors, defining what the category of ‘alternative careers’ represents. He does provide some examples, noting that ‘Database Design’ and ‘Management Analyst’ ads appearing in the Washington DC sources provide job descriptions that are not inconsistent with the skills of a cataloguer or reference librarian in a library.

Throughout the paper, examples of some specific alternative careers can be found. Included in these examples are jobs in marketing, publishing, fund-raising and more. Also, there are numerous computer-science and technology related jobs such as system analyst, webmaster and Internet security specialist. Note that the above enumerated criteria must be met for the career to be considered alternative.

The literature on career patterns for graduates of library schools can be grouped into two broad categories: 1) anecdotal accounts of individuals or groups of librarians who have pursued certain patterns, and 2) surveys of specific LIS populations to determine placement and career paths taken. The anecdotal accounts, especially when they are presented as case studies, can be considered in the tradition of qualitative research which emphasizes what can be learned by examining individuals or specific groups. The significant limitation of such a methodology is that one cannot generalize the results or conclusions to other groups or to the population of all LIS graduates. Surveys can be considered in the tradition of quantitative research and should meet certain criteria, including proper survey administration, so that the results can be generalized to a larger population.
confident that the findings can be generalizable, the survey must be properly constructed to confirm the validity and reliability of the resulting data and the survey response rate must be sufficiently large to be able to assume that a representative sample has been obtained. Qualitative methodology using case studies, interviews and similar techniques can supplement and enrich the context of results obtained from quantitative research and provide a basis for future research questions to be investigated. Although both case studies and surveys have limitations that can reduce the ability to generalize the results to the population of LIS graduates as a whole, both provide valuable information that is enhanced when both methods are examined in conjunction. Discussion of methodology limitations appear in the analysis of each of these approaches in the following review of the literature on the topic of alternative careers for LIS graduates.

**Anecdotal accounts**

There are many anecdotal accounts of career patterns in LIS. Most share stories of the author’s experience with alternative jobs or they compile reports from others on non-traditional career patterns of people who have LIS degrees. But some articles combine both anecdotal and survey information. In a review article in *Advances in Librarianship*, Koenig (1991) provides largely anecdotal data; however, he also reviews survey information to lend credence to his assertion that there is much interest in careers outside of the traditional library setting. His listings of works that offer potential target areas of employment for those holding degrees in library sciences is extensive. With the number of works available listing potential alternative careers, Koenig states that the list of options easily reaches a ‘substantial three-figure number’ (1991: 3). Koenig proceeds to discuss potential alternative careers, including: information brokering, marketing, publishing, consulting, information consultant, data administration, system analyst and system design, and chief information officer. Transferable LIS skills are discussed that include: knowledge of information sources, information and data organization abilities, and interpersonal skills and need elicitation. In closing, Koenig discusses the implications for library education in regard to building transferable skills.

In the article ‘Alternative Librarianship: Voices from the Field’, Robertson (1998) provides brief information on several librarians working in alternative careers. A former college librarian who has gone into communications consulting and earns in excess of $100,000 a year, a library services consultant, a fundraiser for charities and non-profit institutions, a corporate records manager and Internet security specialist, a book dealer and a storyteller and seniors’ activities specialist are all featured in this work. Reasons expressed for securing positions in alternative careers include higher salaries, market demand forcing exploration outside of librarianship and the opportunity to learn something new. As is often found in literature on alternative careers, Robertson discusses the difficulty with defining this concept and offers the following definition: ‘any librarian in an information-based job not traditionally recognized as standard or “normal” could be considered a practitioner of alternative librarianship’ (1998: 26).

*Library Journal* has published supporting articles to its annual publication of results of the annual survey of the placement of graduates from ALA accredited programmes. Some of the supporting articles contain anecdotal information about alternative careers, and often include survey results as supporting data. One such article was written by Williams (1994) and is entitled ‘You Can Take Your MLS Out of the Library’. In this article, the ‘alternative’ careers of several individuals who hold a Masters degree from an ALA accredited programme, but work outside of a library setting are discussed, as are non-traditional career opportunities, reasons librarians stray outside of the library walls, transferable skills, the difficulties with defining an alternative career and tips for success. Some non-traditional careers that are listed include information brokers, association managers, indexers and abstracters, marketing consultants and storytellers. Reasons suggested for individuals seeking alternative careers relate to both personal circumstances, such as starting a family, and professional circumstances, such as losing a job and needing to find new employment. Transferable skills include information needs assessment ability, problem-solving abilities and a public service mentality. A list of ‘Classics for Career Changers’ is also provided and includes some works reviewed for this study that have also been recommended by others as essential reading for those wishing to secure non-traditional employment, including *New Options for Librarians* (Sellen and Berkner, 1984), *What Else You Can Do with a Library Degree* (Sellen, 1980) and *Opening New Doors: Alternative Careers for Librarians* (Mount, 1993).

A review of catalogue records from WorldCat, as well as articles on the topic of alternative careers revealed the following books (some of which are listed above) that are devoted in part or whole to the topic of alternative careers:


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Survey reviews

Hardesty (2002) reviews surveys, articles and job postings to try to ascertain the historical and current job trend markets for academic and research librarians. In his review he cites previous Library Journal surveys and notes that between the years of 1991–9, known placements of library school graduates accounted for only half or less of the total graduates in any given year. During the same time period, while the number of job placements in college and university libraries tended to remain steady, placements in other types of libraries declined. However, there was a rise in job placements falling in the ill-defined ‘other category’ through the 1990s, and vendors and governmental libraries are specifically offered as placements falling in this category of employment (Hardesty, 2002: 85). Of particular interest is a reference to the Library Journal article by John Berry (1988) entitled ‘The Shortage of Librarians is Back’ that reportedly indicates that library schools are not training individuals sufficiently for traditional roles in libraries and are focusing more on the ‘glamorous specializations in information science and technology and ignoring public library specializations’ (Hardesty, 2002: 80).

In the same article, Hardesty reviews results of previous Association for Library and Information Science (ALISE) surveys to show historical trends in library school enrolment; however, these surveys admittedly do not provide information regarding job placement. Hardesty states that both Library Journal surveys and ALISE surveys provide insufficient information regarding information sciences placements in the private sector since not all accredited library schools report for these surveys (see discussion of Library Journal surveys below). The information gleaned from the Library Journal 1999 survey indicates that a little over 6 percent of respondents held jobs in the information sciences sector, but many of these positions would not be considered ‘alternative careers’ depending on the setting where individuals are employed; for example, a webmaster within a library setting would not be considered an alternative career (Hardesty, 2002: 90).

Koenig (1991), whose article was also discussed under Anecdotal Accounts, also reviews some pertinent survey information (1991). In his discussion of the trends towards LIS graduates accepting positions in non-traditional careers, he cites the data from Learmont and Van Houten (1981) that had been gleaned from analysing two decades worth of Library Journal placement surveys, starting in the 1960s. Learmont’s data revealed a steady rise in library school graduates taking non-traditional positions during the 20-year time period. Koenig proposed a possible correlation between the increasing prevalence of information in electronic formats and the rise in non-traditional job placement. The positive correlation between perceived quality of a library school and higher placement in non-traditional jobs is also revealed in the discussion of

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It is evident from the publication dates of these books that there has been a long-standing interest in alternative careers for librarians. It appears that with technological changes and changes in LIS curricula that the number of alternative career opportunities for individuals with LIS degrees will continue to expand. Indeed, the listings of potential career options have tended to expand and change over the years, and the editor of one of the earlier books on alternative careers, Sellen, recognized the need for updated information and has provided a more current book in 1997 on this topic which she first dealt with in 1980. Among the expanded careers in the 1997 book that were not in the 1980 edition were ‘Private Investigator’ and ‘Prospect Research’ to locate large donors for non-profits and institutions’. It is of interest that none of the alternative careers listed in the 1980 book had become mainstream in 1997. Also, comparing Sellen’s 1997 book to that of Carvell published in 2005, there is little evidence that any of the alternative careers in 1997 had become a ‘typical’ role of librarians in 2005. Thus, at least in these North American oriented career resource books, there is little evidence that alternative careers over the last 25 years have made the transition to the traditional job description of a graduate with an LIS degree.

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Learmont’s findings (Koenig, 1991: 2). In addition, Koenig discusses the difficulty in adequately determining placement statistics on non-traditional career placement. Difficulties in obtaining adequate data include the failure to clearly define what constitutes a ‘non-traditional career’ for LIS graduates, as well as a history of inaccurate statistical data gathering. Based on the Learmont findings, as well as the findings of Roderer (1983) who performed a library supply and demand study, the placement data would indicate that 4–5 percent of LIS graduates go into non-traditional careers and an estimated 9 percent of library career changers go into work outside of library settings. Based on this data, Koenig suggests that there are probably 6–10 percent of librarians working in non-traditional settings. Although this suggested percentage is low, the interest in non-traditional careers is great, and results of several studies (Sergean et al., 1976; Sergean, 1977; Slater, 1984) that indicate a high rate of job dissatisfaction among librarians are offered as one potential reason for the rising interest in alternative careers. Koenig goes on to discuss some possible non-traditional careers and transferable job skills, as well as listing numerous publications on the topic of alternative careers (see Anecdotal Accounts).

The placement surveys in Library Journal

A review of the long-standing Library Journal placement survey, which usually appears in the 15 October issue of Library Journal, suggests that in most years fewer than 10 percent of the graduates responding to the survey find jobs in alternative careers (jobs not involving work in libraries or with library vendors). In 2004, the most recent year available as this paper is being written, there was an increase in the percentage of respondents that reported being employed outside of the traditional realm of libraries or library vendors. The survey for 2004 indicates that nearly 9 percent of graduates employed in alternative career positions (Maatta, 2005). In 2003, 2002, 2001 and 2000 it was only 2 percent or fewer that reported working in alternative careers (Terrell and Gregory, 2001; Terrell, 2002; Maatta, 2003, 2004). In 1999, 3 percent of all those graduates responding reported being employed outside traditional work in libraries or by library vendors (Gregory and Wohlmut, 2000). While there are significant problems with being able to generalize from the Library Journal survey data, it is the best data we have available. The Library Journal surveys certainly suggest that in the US and Canada, the percentage of graduates from ALA Accredited LIS programmes that find employment in non-traditional or alternative careers has often been less than 3 percent of the total graduates responding to the survey, but the increase in the 2004 survey may be indicative of changes in LIS job trends. However, as indicated above, there are significant difficulties with obtaining accurate and generalizable data on career placements in general, and alternative placements in particular, in the Library Journal survey. The fundamental problem with Library Journal placement data is that in almost every year reviewed (1999–2004 surveys), no more than 40 percent (and often less) of the total number of US and Canadian graduates participated in the placement survey. An initial review of the Library Journal data would suggest a better response rate than this, with the articles indicating that 40 percent of the LIS graduates in 2004 responded and 52 percent in 2001 responded. But a closer examination of the survey details indicates that these response rates reflect the responses from those schools that submitted data on their graduates, and in most years fewer than 80 percent of the schools with ALA Accredited Masters degree programmes responded. In 2002, only 56 percent of the schools (32 out of 56) submitted data on their graduates. In 2004, which had one of the best response rates in recent years, only 80 percent of the schools participated. Using data on the number of graduates from ALA Accredited programmes available from the Association for Library and Information Science (ALISE) annual Statistical Report, the 51 percent rate for 2002 graduates from the 32 schools that submitted responses represented 1486 returns from 2902 graduates. But the ALISE statistics for 2002 graduates indicated that 4923 individuals received ALA accredited degrees in 2002 (ALISE, 2003). The Library Journal survey data thus represents approximately 30 percent of all graduates for that period, making the results of little use as a basis for generalizing to the population of all graduates.

The Library Journal distinguishes between library positions, vendor positions and ‘other’. In 2004, they reported that the ‘other’ category included a wide range of jobs, from business analysis positions to digital initiatives. Specific positions outside libraries were reported as being involved with e-commerce, data mining and data asset management, community outreach, grant-writing, fundraising and international relations. Survey respondents working in these areas reported that prior experience in areas outside of libraries, such as business and computer science, was helpful in their finding these alternative jobs.

The graduates responding to the 2004 Library Journal survey who reported having ‘alternative jobs’ to library positions reported salaries that were approximately 18 percent higher than the overall average salary of all library placements, suggesting that jobs outside libraries do pay more. The higher salaries obtained by this group might be a result of their prior experience, but specific data on this was not provided in the Library Journal report. Many of the students who obtained non-traditional employment had worked in related fields to their alternative career placement before getting their LIS degree (Maatta, 2005).

Surveys of specific cohorts in the US and Canada

Jacobsen (2004) surveyed UCLA’s 1988 class of LIS graduates to determine how careers had progressed among
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this group over their 15 years following graduate school and highlighted the careers of six of the participants. Two distinct groups emerged from this survey, the ‘loyalists’ who stayed long-term within their institution, and the ‘changers’ who had multiple jobs throughout their career. Initial job placement tended to influence future career settings, with individuals tending to remain within the same type of environment; however, roles tended to evolve and change over time. Over 80 percent of the respondents worked in library settings, but it is unclear how many of those working outside of libraries would qualify as having alternative careers. As found in other surveys, those salaries were highest among those employed in the private sector, but salary was not mentioned as a negative by any respondents and overall this group of respondents appeared happy within the field.

Cronin et al. (1993) use information gleaned from multiple sources, including surveys, interviews and analysis of job advertisements to assess the emerging market for information professionals working outside of the library setting and suggest changes within LIS curricula to better align the educational offerings with existing trends. They note that there were changes in LIS curricula that occurred during the 1980s to the early 1990s that reflected the need to provide students with training that will allow them to enter the ‘emergent market’ for information professionals. The analysis of job postings did indeed indicate that there were job opportunities for those with LIS degrees outside of the traditional realm, but the majority of the job postings were for those with experience in certain areas and did not encourage entry-level applicants. The interviews of individuals who were considered to be working or hiring in the non-traditional library realm supported the assumption that the market for non-traditional employment is expanding. However, the interviews, as well as surveys of LIS graduates, indicated that subject expertise and business savvy are considered crucial to entering non-traditional employment areas and the LIS degree may not provide adequate training in these realms. The mail survey of 1985 and 1988 LIS graduates from Indiana University to determine individuals working in non-traditional settings had an extremely low response rate, with only 18 percent of surveys being returned, and little discussion of the survey findings were offered; however, it was indicated that few graduates of the programme were working in non-traditional areas.

Some of the surveys are clearly non-scientific studies (non-scientific in so far as they were not based on a random sample or a total population and thus the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population), but they might be considered interesting case studies that may serve as the basis of more scientific research in the future. One such survey was that of Sellen (1980). She surveyed 246 people who were known to have careers outside traditional LIS. She did obtain a 65 percent response rate, but she acknowledges that since she did not base her survey population on a random or scientifically designed sample, her results cannot be the basis for generalization to career patterns of LIS graduates as a whole.

Her survey resulted in a listing of alternative careers, and suggestions for alternative careers in LIS are available in the book edited by Sellen (1997) What Else You Can Do With a Library Degree. From her survey, it was found that the most common type of self-employed work was that of consultant (15), information broker (9) and indexer (7). Of those not self employed, the largest group worked for publishers (21), government (11) and bookstores (7). Vendors and universities followed with six of the respondents working for each of these groups. There were a wide variety of employers with five or fewer respondents represented, including associations, information management and non-profit organizations. Only two respondents indicated they worked for a computer services employer, and only one as a systems designer (Sellen, 1980: xxv).

In 1981 and 1982 Sellen sent longer surveys and reported on the results in 1984 and 1985 articles (Sellen and Vaughn, 1984, 1985). This survey, as the earlier one, attempted to answer multiple questions surrounding alternative careers for librarians, including the number of individuals employed in alternative careers, the characteristics of non-traditionally employed librarians, such as backgrounds and basic demographic information, salaries, and specific job duties and employment settings. It is interesting to note that the survey administrator found it difficult to elicit specific information regarding what individuals in alternative work places actually did and at what type of workplace they were employed. A forced-choice format was provided to determine workplace, while a fill-in-the-blank format was utilized to obtain job titles, and a multiple-choice question with multiple answers allowed was utilized to attempt to determine primary areas of work. Numerous job titles were obtained from the surveys, as were numerous employment settings. Of those surveyed who had held jobs in a library, the most frequently cited reasons for switching to an alternative career included salary dissatisfaction, location change, and better job opportunity (Sellen and Vaughn, 1985: 109).

Out of 447 respondents from Sellen’s 1981 and 1982 survey, 10 percent were self employed and owned their own businesses and 10 percent were free-lance workers. The remaining 80 percent were employed either by the government or the private sector. The incomes of these three groups were reported in ranges, with the full-time free-lance respondents earning an annual median income in the range of $15,000-$19,000, while those who owned their own business or were employed full-time earned median annual incomes in the range of $20,000-$24,999 (Sellen and Vaughn, 1985: 108). This compares to the median income of all 1983 graduates as reported in the Library
placement survey of $16,994, which suggests that those who were free-lance were doing about as well as all graduates and those who were employed in alternative careers or had their own business did better than the average of all graduates as reported by the Library Journal (Learmont and Van Houten, 1984).

Surveys of graduates outside the US and Canada

Although we did not attempt an exhaustive literature review in non-English language literature, we did find some interesting reviews and survey reports in English from outside of the United States and Canada. Marcella and Baxter (1998) provide one of the more complete literature reviews on the topic of alternative careers for LIS graduates. A chronological analysis of their citations indicates a nearly equal distribution of literature from the 1980s and the 1990s, with 11 cited sources in each decade (see Appendix 1 for a listing of these citations). They noted that Cronin (1983) suggested that library educators had a choice of educating information professionals for the ‘institutionally defined’ job market or they could direct their focus on the ‘mushrooming information periphery’. But it is interesting to note that 22 years after Cronin characterized the information periphery as ‘mushrooming’ we still do not have evidence in the US and Canada that this periphery has provided much in the way of substantial job placement for LIS graduates (based on Library Journal surveys).

In addition to providing a significant literature review on the topic of alternative careers for LIS, Marcella and Baxter (1998) also discussed results from a 1997 survey carried out on LIS graduates of Robert Gordon University, located in Aberdeen, Scotland. This survey had a 45 percent response rate. Analysis of employment information was performed and respondents’ jobs were categorized into various employment sectors, including: research, information technology, information service/support, financial analysis/policy analysis, librarianship etc. Of the jobs held by survey respondents 29.4 percent were categorized in the research sector, 19.6 percent in information technology, 15.7 percent in information service/support, 9.8 percent in financial analysis/policy analysis, 3.9 percent in librarianship, and the remaining jobs scattered throughout various sectors. This employment pattern suggests a vastly different one than that found among graduates from the US and Canada; however, descriptions of job duties falling in certain sectors suggest that some of these jobs would not be categorized as ‘alternative’ based on the definition of alternative careers being utilized for this paper.

Pors (1990) reports on library school education in Denmark and provides statistical data on the Danish job market and students’ employment preferences and placements. It is interesting to note that the library school curriculum in Denmark was changed in 1985 to broaden the educational focus from a strict library one (public or research and special libraries), to encompass the broader focus area of information work in addition to the library focus. It is reported that the librarian unemployment rate was high during the mid-1980s (15–20 percent) with the public sector nearly reaching a saturation point for librarians. A survey of library school graduates from 1977–88 revealed that more students tended to become employed outside of the public sector over the years. There was obvious growth in employment in the ‘private/other’ category as compared to the public library and research and special library categories. In addition, student preferences tended to change during this period, with an increasing interest in non-traditional employment. Between the years of 1988 and 1989 alone, there was a significant increase in interest for non-traditional employment. Because the ‘private/other’ category is vague, it is uncertain if all jobs falling in this category would actually be considered as non-traditional based on the definition utilized for this study.

In addition to summarizing his own survey results, Pors discusses the survey results from 10 European library schools, carried out on students entering school in 1985 and 1986, to further support the assertion that there is growing interest in non-traditional employment. This survey, initiated by Bruyns (1989), showed that over 30 percent of respondents would like to work as an information consultant or specialist, or work in ‘other types of employment’ (Pors, 1990: 123). The ‘other types of employment’ category excludes the specialization areas of public library, research or special library and information consultant or specialist.

In the article ‘Changing Employment Patterns: An Australian Experience’, results are presented of a survey of 1997–2001 LIS graduates of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) (Willard et al., 2003). The purpose of this survey was to determine employment patterns of the graduates and gather their opinions on the usefulness of their education, and utilize this information for ongoing curriculum assessment and development. It was found that the majority of individuals had found employment in traditional settings; however, 29 percent were employed in positions that did not indicate a connection to a traditional library or information centre and these individuals tended to have higher salaries than those working in more traditional roles. It is reported that the UNSW programme trains individuals for information work within and outside the realms of traditional librarianship; therefore, graduates of this programme might have a higher tendency to enter into alternative careers than graduates from a more traditional programme.

Zainab et al. (2004) provide a brief overview of some ‘tracer surveys’ in their introductory literature review. In the literature review, they reveal that a survey of graduates from the LIS programme at Curtin University of Technology, Australia, found that individuals from this programme were occupying jobs outside of the tradi-
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There is obvious long-standing interest in alternative careers for those with LIS degrees. While the Library Journal survey indicated that the percentage of graduates finding non-traditional or alternative jobs increased significantly in 2005 to almost 10 percent of all placements, we are still tapping less than half of all the graduates of LIS programmes in the United States and Canada. Thus, ascertaining the percentage of individuals with LIS degrees who have secured non-traditional employment continues to be difficult. A recurrent problem with job placement surveys is that it is difficult to glean information through this type of data collection instrument. Job titles, name of employing organization and job descriptions may not accurately reflect the true nature of the work. Also, inadequate response rates make it difficult to get an accurate overview of employment patterns. Failure to adopt a uniform definition of ‘alternative careers’ also makes it difficult to analyze data across multiple surveys. Because of the difficulties with accurately determining the percentage of LIS graduates holding non-traditional jobs, it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations about the employment patterns in the United States, Canada and other countries. From the information gleaned from the literature review, there is an obvious tendency for those working in the private sector to have higher salaries, and it appears from survey responses that interest in alternative careers has risen over the years. Numerous reasons are offered for the increased interest in alternative careers, including: technological drivers, career disaffection, salary incentives, market demand forcing exploration outside of traditional librarianship and the opportunity to learn new skills. But in terms of being able to find survey research data that supports the anecdotal reports of increasing interest and opportunities for LIS graduates to find alternative careers with their LIS degrees, we have to say we did not find such data in the US and Canada. There was some evidence from surveys that graduates in other countries were more successful in finding alternative careers, but even here the survey results are not consistent and not always presented in sufficient detail to confirm that there is a significant trend in successful employment in alternative careers.

Schools of library and information science, both in the United States and abroad, have an obvious need to be informed of the career desires of their applicants and currently enrolled students, as well as the job placements of their graduates. Only by maintaining a current awareness of job trends within the field will schools be able to provide first-rate curricula that meet the needs of their students and optimally promote the development of skills that will allow graduates to succeed in their career of choice, be it traditional librarianship or an alternative career.

The international implications for analysing career patterns for LIS school graduates may be especially important as LIS schools explore and proceed toward implementation of international LIS degree programmes that cross national borders through the utilization of the Internet and the World Wide Web. There are a number of programmes that are in the planning stages or in operation today. As more develop, the need for accurate data on job placement and alternative careers for LIS graduates will become even more important.
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Because graduate career placement surveys are wrought with difficulties that often lead to response rates that are inadequate and fail to provide a global picture of employment patterns, it is recommended that LIS schools augment career placement surveys with surveys of applicants. These applicant surveys could be a mandatory part of the application process and could yield invaluable insight into the career interests of those wishing to obtain degrees in LIS.

Future studies might wish to augment survey results with interviews of respondents to gain further insight into non-traditional careers as well as changing roles within traditional careers. In addition, encouraging all schools within a country or group of countries to participate in job placement surveys would help to develop a better national and regional picture of the career patterns of LIS graduates.

Clearly there is a need for more longitudinal studies (tracer studies) to determine the career pattern not just upon graduation but also five and ten years after graduation. This information would not only be useful in those situations where there is high unemployment in specific periods of placement, but also helpful to determine needed continuing education programmes to assist alumni in their career information needs as they progress in their jobs.

But the most pressing need, especially in the US and Canada, is for improved response rates to the existing surveys of placement of graduates. Much time and money is being wasted when year after year results of surveys yield 30 percent or 40 percent of all graduates. The gap between the anecdotal accounts of alternative careers as an option for LIS graduates and the known patterns of alternative careers will continue to exist until we have solved this problem. There are numerous techniques for improving response rates, including, but not limited to, timely follow-up to non-respondents and providing rewards to those who do respond. But the most likely long-term method for improving response rates is the building of a sense of loyalty and obligation among the students before they graduate so they will share their placement experiences and career progresses with their school and the profession when asked to do so. The approach of loyalty and obligation may not work in all contexts or even in all countries because of differing cultural and social attitudes. But in the United States where many of our LIS schools have been educating librarians for a hundred years or more, there is a strong inclination toward loyalty toward professional schools as evidenced by alumni support of gifts and endowments to their LIS schools and participation in alumni receptions and gatherings, and regional and national conferences.

It is hoped that future studies will provide sufficient statistical data that can be applied effectively by schools of LIS as they plan both the future curriculum and employment counselling to graduates. We look forward to hearing suggestions and strategies from those who read our paper. Future improvements in determining the career patterns of our students is most likely to occur if it is a cooperative effort on the part of LIS schools to implement joint procedures in data gathering and uniform terminology for describing the results, so we can provide a comparative analysis of career patterns of graduates that is useful internationally.

REFERENCES


Alternative careers for graduates of LIS schools


APPENDIX 1 – CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF CITATIONS FOUND IN MARCELLA AND BAXTER (1998)

1980:

1983:


1984:

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Alternative careers for graduates of LIS schools


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