Introduction: Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science, Part 2

JOANNE GARD MARSHALL, SUSAN RATHBUN-GRUBB, DEBORAH BARREAU, AND JENNIFER CRAFT MORGAN, COEDITORS

This double issue represents a continuation of our first collection of research articles on workforce issues published in *Library Trends*, Volume 58, Number 2, Fall 2009. Concerns about the current and future state of the library workforce continue to grow as greater numbers of Baby Boomers move closer to their retirement years. As Manjarrez, Ray, and Bisher point out in this issue, half of librarians were over age fifty in 2007, and a fifth of librarians were over age sixty. A number of factors have made librarianship one of the occupations with the highest proportion of older workers: many librarians enter the profession as a second career; reductions in hiring in public and academic libraries during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in fewer hires of younger librarians; and high levels of job satisfaction contribute to worker longevity in positions. The complexity of the library workforce situation is also increased by the greater proportion of women in the profession who are more likely than men to have career interruptions and caregiving demands for both child care and elder care. In some cases, these responsibilities, or even being married to an older spouse, may result in some women retiring at an earlier age.

While there has been much discussion and speculation about workforce issues in the past, research data on the subject has been sparse. Most studies have been limited in size and scope and have produced snapshots from narrow or focused angles rather than comprehensive and wide-angle pictures of the changes that are occurring in the library workforce over time. Since librarianship is not a licensed profession requiring annual registration and submission of job information, as is the case in the health professions, we have not had a strong body of workforce data to draw upon for educational and workforce planning. Nor is it easy for policy makers or even prospective recruits to find out about workforce needs.
and trends. Much of the workforce literature that does exist has often been published as reports rather than in the indexed journal literature, making it challenging to find.

Fortunately, the editors of Library Trends agreed to publish an issue on workforce issues in 2009, which allowed us to begin bringing together some of the existing research studies. Since there were a number of authors with key insights who would have liked to submit an article for consideration but were unable to meet the deadline, the editors agreed to publish a second issue on the topic. A public call for submissions resulted in twenty-nine responses and the final nineteen articles appear in this second issue. We were impressed by the range and quality of the submissions and the number of important research questions that are being investigated not only in the United States but also internationally. We are indebted to the Library Trends editors for providing the means to bring this important work together at a critical time in the history of our profession. Our hope is that it will inspire future researchers and provide evidence for informed educational and workforce planning at all levels.

An overview of the contents of this issue gives a picture of the diversity of recent workforce research and the challenges that we face. Manjarrez, Ray, and Bisher’s demographic overview of the current and projected library workforce is a landmark work based on a cross survey analysis of major national data sets. The authors from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) point out the limitations of the currently available data sets and set the stage for continuing the discussion of this challenging situation. Both librarians and library technicians are discussed at the national and state levels. Even though the projections suggest modest growth for the paraprofessional segment of the workforce and stable demand for ALA-accredited MLS librarians, the authors point out that the large number of expected retirements will make it difficult to maintain the current size of the library workforce. The second part of the article documents the IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian (LB21) funding program, which has stimulated the recruitment and education of the next generation of librarians.

The next two articles are also based on large scale data sets. Marshall, et al. report the results of a second study in the Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science (WILIS) program of research based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. WILIS 2 builds on an earlier comprehensive, retrospective career study of graduates from the six LIS programs in North Carolina between 1964 and 2007. The WILIS 2 team worked with library educators from across North America to modify the recent graduate’s portion of the initial WILIS Web-based survey so that all LIS programs could potentially use it for ongoing program evaluation and alumni career tracking. An overview of the aggregated data collected from thirty-nine participating master’s programs is presented and a case
is made for sustaining this shared approach to alumni tracking. Toolkits from both studies will be available on the study website for use by other programs that want to engage in similar research.

Denise M. Davis from the American Library Association (ALA) provides a wealth of national data in her article on academic and public librarian salaries and library staffing expenditures trends from 2000 to 2009. Davis points out that library salaries/wages and benefits expenditures consume as much as 70 percent of some library operating budgets. She also provides data about the ways in which expenditures on various library functions are changing due to budget limitations and technology expenditures. Davis augments ALA data with additional findings from various national surveys in order to further identify trends. Her work reminds us of the important role that professional associations play in contributing to our knowledge of the library workforce.

The following article by Montiel-Overall and Littletree is one of several important articles in the issue that focus on innovative projects to increase the diversity of the library workforce. Funded by IMLS, Knowledge River is a library and information science program at the University of Arizona that focuses on Latino and Native American perspectives. The case study shares the lessons learned during the project, which aims to be a national model for increasing diversity in information organizations and LIS programs. By contrast, Munde’s article addresses a different kind of diversity in the workplace related to the increasingly intergenerational nature of the library workforce. She suggests ways to avoid some of the potential dangers such as ageism, and approaches that managers can use to resolve intergenerational conflict, meet the professional development needs of age-diverse learners, enable the transfer of institutional knowledge, and encourage work/life balance.

Continuing on the diversity theme, Subramaniam and Jaeger remind us that diversity among faculty in LIS programs needs to mirror the changing diversity in the student population. Strategies include increasing the diversity of LIS doctoral students and offering courses that meet the needs of these diversified populations. A case study of the current state of diversity issues in fourteen LIS doctoral programs is used to further explore approaches to promoting diversity in LIS doctoral education. Wagner and Willms report on a collaboration between St. Catherine University and the St. Paul Public Library to create an Urban Library Program to recruit, educate, hire, and retain a diverse paraprofessional workforce in the metropolitan Twin Cities of Minnesota.

Several of the contributions deal with recruitment, particular sectors of the library workforce, or educational programs. Maxey-Harris, Cross, and McFarland focus on the importance of student library workers as potential recruits and suggest strategies to encourage such students to enter the profession. Jones uses qualitative research to investigate the reasons
that school librarians select the profession. Carroll and Murray take us “down under” to Australia in their study of professional and vocational training avenues in the library and information field. Moran, Marshall, and Rathbun-Grubb provide a historically oriented review of studies on the academic library workforce up to the present. Limitations of earlier studies are discussed and the findings from the WLLIS study are used to illustrate the benefits of gathering in-depth career data to gain an understanding of the factors that affect the work trajectories of librarians. Still other sectors of the workforce are highlighted in the work of Arnold who explores community college librarianship and provides framing for further research in this key sector. Latham and Ditzler reflect on the significance and impact of unions in public libraries and Li and Bryan share the results of their study on the use of ClimateQUAL, a tool for investigating employee satisfaction, in an academic library setting.

Several authors have focused on workforce competencies. Gonzalez documents a process used by urban library leaders to identify the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities required to work in this setting. The author suggests undergraduate study in social work, urban planning, popular culture, languages, business administration, and instructional design to be appropriate areas of undergraduate study for those who are interested in working in complex urban libraries. Applegate uses data from a national survey of competencies for library support staff and compares them with American Library Association-approved competencies for beginning MLS librarians and certified support staff. Partridge, Lee, and Munro report on their Australian research project that used focus groups to identify the knowledge and skills required by “librarian 2.0.” Canadian researchers De Long and Sivak provide the results of a training gap analysis for librarians and library technicians conducted by the 8Rs Research Team. This federally funded study builds on the team’s earlier work on the future of human resources in Canadian libraries supported by the Canadian Library Association.

Finally, Hallam, et al. share their ongoing work on the future directions of the health librarian workforce. This study was supported by Health Libraries Australia, a group from the Australian Library and Information Association, again illustrating the important role that professional associations can play in gathering workforce data.

Judging by the response to the call for papers for this theme issue, librarians and researchers are indeed responding to the need for studies that provide reliable data on the library workforce. The Institute of Museum and Library Services continues to provide leadership in the collection of national statistics that can inform future planning as well as funding innovative research projects in the workforce area. Researchers in professional associations, libraries, and graduate programs in LIS are also contributing to this much needed body of knowledge. Library and
information science workforce research is burgeoning at this opportune time to help the profession identify and utilize a base of evidence to inform workforce and education planning to meet the challenges of an aging and diversifying workforce and the uncertain long-term effects of the current economic turbulence.