

What Can I Expect to Earn: Information Sources for Library Salary Negotiations

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Abstract

Finding salary information about individual library positions is a difficult but not impossible task. There are sources available for free and for fee which tell someone what salary to ask for in a given location. Commercially available tools are also available over the Internet. Two Internet-accessible salary tools, from Salary.com and SalaryExpert.com, were reviewed for library positions in the immediate Champaign-Urbana (IL) area. To test the accuracy of these tools, a file was created to compare salary, years of experience and level of responsibility. While requiring a considerable effort, this level of detail provides a better sense of library salaries in a given area. Aggregate figures obtained reveal a considerable difference. Discretion is advised when using these sources for salary negotiations.

Introduction

Now is a challenging time to be a librarian. Mind-boggling technological change has transformed librarianship like it has most professions. Intellectual issues such as diversity, privacy, multiculturalism, and many other issues are frequent visitors at library meetings and conventions. While these factors have lead a significant number of us to enter the profession, and give a great deal of professional satisfaction, challenges regarding whether we are appropriately paid for our level of education and experience seems to be a little more than most librarians bargained for. Many articles have been written about the fulfilling nature of librarianship. Unfortunately, self fulfillment and filling your bank account do not necessarily go together. Abby Kalan captured the feelings when she said succinctly in *American Libraries*, “There is no honor in

being underpaid.”¹

The job seeking and negotiating salary and benefits process can seem like a daunting task. Does it always have to be? There are reference books and research techniques which if carefully and thoughtfully applied, will make the search for good positions in the library world much more manageable than in the past. It is a time-consuming process. Why?

In general most people are very reluctant to give out their salary to strangers or even friends. People who have well-paying positions occasionally share their good fortunes with very close friends or family members in mentioning their new purchases, such as a home or a car. However many of us who work in professions such as librarianship and education seldom discuss such things. Salary information is among the most closely guarded secrets we have, especially amongst a profession like librarians who honor privacy highly. However, the ambiguity of this information can work against ourselves when we are considering employment offers. It is a little like the apprehension when going to buy a new car, the realization that you don't really know what the car cost them and that invariably, someone you know will have made a better deal and will be happy to tell you about it, after the fact, makes car-buying a maddening experience for most people. Likewise, salary negotiations for librarians can engender the same feelings. Rarely do we know what others in the organization make, most especially if the organization is private. Therefore, how can we know what we can expect to make in a prospective institution? Did we get top dollar, or would they have paid more if we had asked? By using some of the simple techniques outlined in this paper to learn more about the pay structure of a targeted organization, librarians can begin to take the offensive battle for higher wages.

Librarians have historically been reluctant to negotiate aggressively for salary. One frequently mentioned factor correlated to low librarian salaries is the preponderance of women in

the profession. Teaching and nursing are other frequently cited professions that are underpaid mainly because a majority of their practitioners are women. Many pay equity initiatives seek to compare these professions with more technically oriented and higher paid professions, which traditionally have had a large majority of men.

Fortunately a few librarians are fighting the good fight and making some significant progress. Mary Jo Lynch in *American Libraries* illustrates in stark detail the need for a tremendous librarian recruitment effort. A phenomenal number of librarians will be reaching retirement age soon.² Mitch Freedman proclaimed salaries and pay equity one of his major focuses during his year as President of the American Library Association and continues to campaign for higher library salaries.³ Pay equity studies can make a difference; Australian librarians were able to get a 26 percent increase in their salaries following a pay equity study.⁴ Simply put, pay equity posits that pay within an organization should be compensated equally for jobs with similar responsibilities and requiring similar education or training. The theory is that some professions, including librarians, earn less money because of historical inequities based on the gender makeup of professions and need to have adjustments made to their salary to correct for this. Librarians, who are predominately female, make less money than similarly classified jobs, such as civil engineers, who are predominately male. A similar study in California public libraries revealed a large shortfall within library pay scales that can be addressed under a pay equity rubric.⁵ Several states have attempted pay equity studies and adjustments, with mixed success for librarians. Other factors such as equity issues within individual libraries has also been closely investigated, and some librarians have benefited from these efforts.⁶

The American Library Association-Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA) has been formed as a separate entity to be able to advocate for library salaries. The reason for the separate

entity is because ALA is prohibited because of its tax-exempt status. *The Advocating for Better Salaries and Pay Toolkit* is a product of this concerted effort.⁷

Librarians in general are not assertive negotiators. While many of the above mentioned activities are being done on the behalf of all library workers, each and every salary offer is a chance for librarians to strike a blow for the profession. Will we get a base hit, or strike out during our trips to the library salary negotiation plate? Will we see “supply and demand” prop up the salaries of librarians when the number of retirees reaches alarming proportions? Or will this be seen as opportunity for institutions to trade a large salary for a smaller one? Or is a chance to eliminate the position entirely and reap the salary savings? Studies of library salaries have uncovered some interesting results. Richard Waters found that in public libraries during the last ten years, library directors have gained more than new librarians, and that “most of the increases in personnel costs went for more employees, not better salaries for existing employees.”⁸

Information on existing local salary conditions is an important first step in negotiating salary. Of course, other factors can have an influence on our decision. Lesser benefits such as two weeks vacation, while other institutions have four weeks, can have a negative impact on a job offer. But where can one find information on local salary structures? For some jobs, this is fairly simple. While not easy, information about salaries at institutions, which are publicly funded, such as most academic, school and public libraries, is usually publicly accessible. Some may have a budgetary document that lists the salary of every employee, including those working in the library. For others, it may require a “freedom of information act” request. Many libraries pay their employees based on a formal “salary schedule.”

A couple of research partners, Sarah Nesbeitt Johnson and Rachel Singer Gordon oversee two of the best Web sites for library job announcements: *Library Job Postings on the Internet*; and

Jobs for Librarians and Information Professionals, respectively.⁹ However, many library job notices simply mention something like “salary commensurate with education and experience.” Some mention a range, which can be a little more helpful, especially if you are just getting out of library school or are a highly experienced veteran, but the vast majority in the middle of the bell curve will not have much to go on when they start to negotiate in the middle of that range.

Another career information-oriented librarian with a great deal of experience in this area is Margaret Riley, Webmaster of *The Riley Guide: Employment Opportunities and Job Resources on the Internet*.¹⁰ *The Riley Guide* includes a section reporting an HR Professional’s evaluation of the Salary.com Personal Salary Report.

Tools for Librarian Salary Negotiation

Jan Davis Tudor in an article for *EContent* summarizes the standard tools available for finding salary surveys. Several Web sites provide information on literally thousands of positions for thousands of different locations.¹¹ Finding information for librarians shouldn’t be difficult, right? However, having an average figure does not give one the information one needs to negotiate an individual salary, as this piece will show.

The most commonly used tool in the salary negotiation toolkit is the salary survey. The American Library Association and the Special Libraries Association have been conducting salary surveys for many years now.¹² Aggregate salary information is relatively easy to produce. Anonymity is the reason many are prepared to reveal their salaries. In many cases, surveys have been done for a large number of years, allowing for comparison of data over time.

Another important tool that can be consulted for academic librarian salaries is the Academic Research Libraries group, an organization of 123 large institutions, scattered across the United States and Canada. The ARL Statistics Interactive Edition allows for detailed analysis of

salary data for these institutions.¹³

If one is looking for state salary information, one can look at the “Regional Salary Guide” within the Career Leads section of *American Libraries*. Nearly half of the states are listed, showing considerable variation, with 3 listed as “varies.” Texas after careful study of the issue, decided to raise their minimum salary to \$33,500.¹⁴ The Illinois listing in the “Regional Salary Guide” of *American Libraries* lists the minimum starting salary for public librarians as \$33,375.60.

One important consideration when considering salary is factoring in the cost of living for the target area. Searches in the same area may negate this as a factor, but a cross-country move will often make differences in cost of living a major consideration. Someone from Texas may have been able to live very well for \$40,000, whereas \$50,000 in the San Francisco Bay area may be barely making ends meet. Print based tools such as the ACCRA Index can help provide important data. Several cost of living calculators can be found on the Web, but as Zumalt, Smith, and Song caution in a recent article, relying too heavily on only one of the Internet tools designed to convert cost of living between cities can be misleading since the calculators’ data vary quite a bit.¹⁵

Study: Do Commercial Salary Evaluation Sources Work for Librarians?

Since many users will try to get some of their salary information and ideas from the World Wide Web, many commercial and non-commercial Internet sites have sprouted up that try to help job seekers with their salary negotiations, especially if they are considering an institution that engages in negotiation. Some organizations, mostly union shops, use a posted salary schedule to determine compensation. Even if one is only allowed a “take it or leave it” offer, understanding what constitutes a reasonable offer is important due diligence which all librarians should exercise. Careful review of these sites is an important step for a successful job search.

Commercial salary report sites are quite easy to find on the Internet. Searches were performed using the phrase “salary reports” with both Google and Yahoo, with Salary.com and SalaryExpert.com being the first two listings. Salary.com provides a free basic report, which is really an advertisement to try the Personal Salary Report, costing \$29.¹⁶ SalaryExpert.com offers a free Basic Salary Report. A 17 page Premium Salary Report is available from them for \$24.95.¹⁷

To test the validity of the salary figures provided by these commercial reports, a master file has been constructed gathering salary and experience data for all of the library positions in the Champaign-Urbana (C-U) area. After describing the salary data found within each library organization, a comparison was made between the average numbers from the salary database and the numbers given by each commercial services (Salary.com and SalaryExpert.com), using a librarian with 15 years experience as the model. Numbers were also calculated for early career librarians with less than 10 years of experience; mid career librarians with 10 to 20 years of experience; and later career librarians with more than 20 years experience.

Creation of a C-U Librarian Salary and Experience File

Champaign-Urbana is a discrete urbanized area surrounded by mostly corn and soybean production. It is the center of the Champaign-Urbana Metropolitan Statistical Area comprising the three Illinois counties of Champaign, Ford and Piatt. According to the Census Bureau in 2000, there were approximately 110000 people living in town.¹⁸ It is approximately 140 miles south of Chicago, 120 miles west of Indianapolis, and 170 miles northeast of St. Louis. The biggest employer in town is the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a Research I institution with approximately 44000 students.

A number of outliers or excluded groups (e.g., medical librarians have their own category on the commercial sources) were identified and will be eliminated from averages. Examples

include the University Librarian, who is excluded traditionally in the ARL statistics and who usually makes substantially more than other librarians and skews the averages greatly. This was also the case with the Head of the Law Library, who makes substantially more than the other associate professors. One assistant professor's salary was also excluded from that group because of a change in that person's administrative responsibilities skewed the data. For the outliers, local conditions do not prevail; they are able to negotiate largely separate from the other librarians.

The American Library Directory lists the different organizations in each town in the United States and Canada. It is a logical first place to look for library organizations within a city. Many of the key players in a library are listed. Small organizations often have all of their librarians listed. Another important source to use is the membership directories of any large organization you belong to, such as ALA, SLA, the Illinois Library Association, and any regional organizations. For example, Lincoln Trail Library System is a state government funded organization covering the Champaign-Urbana area that not only lists each member library entity in the area but also lists many of the actual librarians in its system.¹⁹ Larger organizations like the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), the University being mostly in Urbana insists on UC, require a little more effort to discern the names and positions of all of its librarians. Like most publicly funded university libraries, UIUC publishes and allows public inspection of its university budget figures, found in a publication commonly known as "the gray book" because of its binding color, for university librarians salaries.²⁰

The UIUC *Alumni Directory*, supplemented by consulting individual librarian web pages (<http://door.library.uiuc.edu/faculty/>), provided experience levels.²¹ With approximately 55% of the librarians in all of the institutions in town graduating from the UIUC library school, this is a logical place to look for graduation dates for all of the librarians in the list. Experience as defined

in this paper will be counted as starting with the granting of the MLS degree.

“Freedom of Information” requests are another tool used to find employees and their salaries from public organizations. In Champaign-Urbana, information for a number of public organizations hiring librarians can be obtained this way. They include the public school districts, the public libraries, and also the community college district.

Another interesting resource available to check the salaries, experience and education level of school librarians is a Web site entitled The Champion. The sponsoring organization, Family Taxpayer Network, has done “freedom of information requests” for all of the school districts in the state of Illinois and made them accessible over the Internet. Searching can be done by name, specific school district, and several other parameters to obtain more detailed information on school librarians. Annual salaries go back to 1998-1999 school year.²²

Lastly, a small number of librarians have part-time positions. For purposes of this study, the hourly rate of pay of a part-time position was determined and then converted into a full-time salary.

Findings

C-U Librarian Salary Figures Obtained from Commercial Sources

Salary.com leads one through a detailed process, adding to their own database, before they are able to tailor your own Personal Salary Report. There are listings for Assistant Librarian, Librarian, Medical Librarian and Chief Medical Librarian. According to Salary.com in early 2003, a Librarian working in an organization of 200-500 people had an estimated market value, including cash bonuses in Champaign-Urbana, of \$31,024-\$33,645. Salary .com reported a Market Range (listed as “market data reflecting the combination of industry, company size, and geographic region you specified”). The low range figure was \$30,042, the mid range was \$34,431, and the high

range was \$39,504. The rest of the report is basic information to help you with negotiations, most of which can be found in any good salary negotiation book or article.

SalaryExpert.com reported an average of \$43,047 for a business librarian with 15 years experience, half will earn between \$28,187 and \$61,217. These figures are claimed to come from “real, area specific, survey data.” On their website, they list 41 different categories for “Librarian”, too many to be easily used by the customer. Many of them seem rather incomplete or inaccurate, such as claiming the duties of a high school librarian as “teach courses in foreign (i.e. Other than English) languages and literature.”

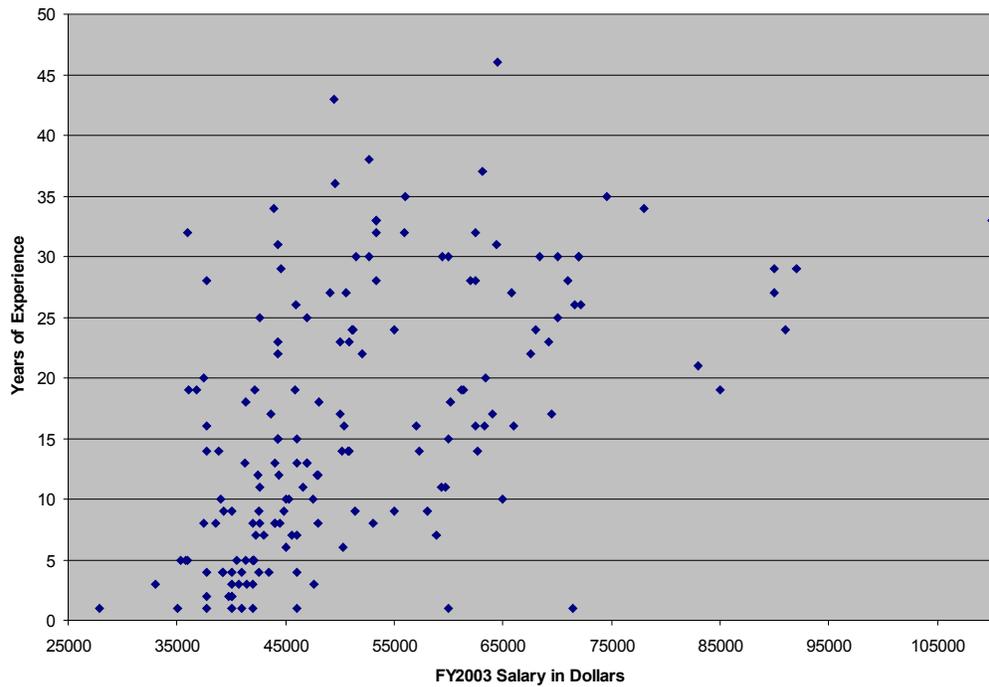
C-U Librarian Salary Figures Derived from Local Documents

Salary numbers were found for nearly all of these librarians (232). The average salary for this group was \$52515. Experience levels were found for 171 of the 235 (they averaged 17 years of experience). There was both salary and experience information for 170 of the 235 librarians. How does experience matter when it comes to salary expectations? A logical split will place librarians into three categories based on years of experience. Early Career Librarians will have less than 10 years of experience. Middle Career Librarians will have at least 10 but not more than 20 years of experience. Later Career Librarians will have over 21 years of experience. Through this lens, Early Career Librarians in Champaign-Urbana earned \$43150 and had 5 years average experience, Middle Career Librarians earned \$50546 and had 15 years average experience, and Later Career Librarians earned \$60630 and had 30 years average experience.

Table 1. Large and Medium Sized Library Units in Champaign-Urbana

Institution	# of Librarians	Average Salary	Average Years of Experience	Experience Range
University Library All Faculty	113	\$57,440	16	1 to 46
Full Professors	17	\$77,706	30	19 to 46
Associate Professors	43	\$59,690	20	9 to 37
Assistant Professors	46	\$44,854	9	1 to 35
Visiting Professors	7	\$42,210	6	2 to 10
Other UIUC Affiliates				
Illinois Library Computer Systems Organization (ILCSO)	10	\$65,310	22	16 to 28
ERIC Clearinghouse for Early Childhood Education	7	\$44,600	11	5 to 32
Center for Institutional Cooperation (CIC) Public Libraries	3	\$96,940	11	1 to 20
Champaign Public Library District (CPLD)	27	\$50,982	17	1 to 32
Urbana Free Library (UFL)	18	\$46,589	19	4 to 38
Public Schools				
Champaign Unit 4	14	\$45,440	16	1 to 35
Urbana Public Schools	8	\$49,482	27	1 to 33
Other				
Parkland Community College (PCC)	6	\$49,239	16	7 to 24
Lincoln Trail Library System (LTLS)	7	\$44,496	12	2 to 27

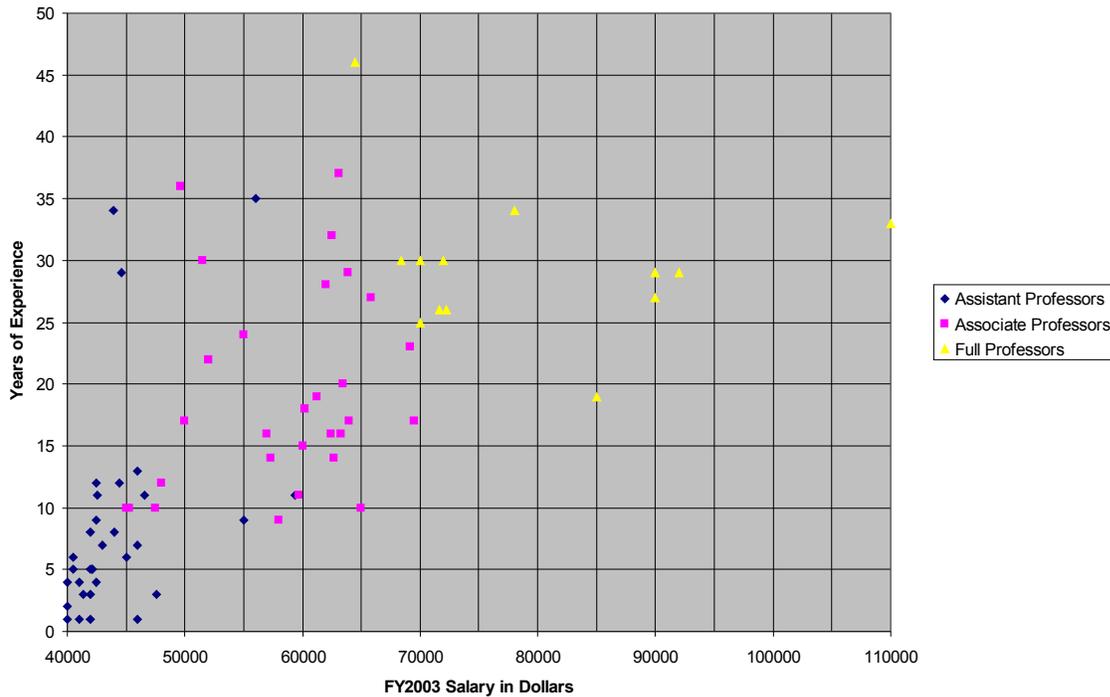
Table 2. Experience and Salary Level of All Champaign-Urbana Librarians



As we can see from both Tables 1 and 2, most librarians in Champaign-Urbana were making significantly more money than either of the commercial salary reports indicated for this area.

As expected from a large university town, the University of Illinois employs the most librarians by a wide margin. The UIUC Library employs 117 Visiting, Tenured, or Tenure-Track librarians. A detailed salary report for the last several years is found on the library Web site under “UIUC Library Salary Report.”²³ According to this report for FY 2003 with the University Librarian excluded, the overall average salary in 2003 was \$57,278, Full Professors averaged \$80,707, Associate Professors averaged \$61,842, and Assistant Professors averaged \$44,892. These numbers correspond closely with the UC Librarian Salary Database figures for these ranks: \$79,994; \$61,201; and \$44,873,

Table 3. Experience Level and Salaries of UIUC Tenure-Track and Tenured Librarians



Another insight into librarian salaries at UIUC is found in the information reported to the Association of Research Libraries. The University Library’s largest category includes those who are tenured or are tenure track. However, other employees such as “academic professionals,” some of whom are librarians, are reported to ARL as “Professional Staff.” ARL Statistics Interactive Edition provides a powerful search mechanism to obtain generalized salary information. UIUC reported 176 “Professional Staff” in 2002. The average salary for this group was \$48,899.

A small group of librarians who worked in UIUC was the ERIC Clearinghouse for Early Childhood Education. There were 7 Librarians. They were part of the College of Education’s Department of Curriculum and Instruction. They had an average of 11 years average experience. They had an average salary of \$44,600. Note: in an effort to save money, the federal government in December 2003 closed this office.

Another group of librarians working at the University is the group at the Illinois Library Computer Systems Organization (ILCSO). These 10 librarians coordinate the library consortium in Illinois of 65 member academic libraries. Their average salary was \$65,310. They had an average of 22 years of professional experience.

Another small group of librarians at UIUC work to coordinate activities between a large number of large academic institutions. The Center for Institutional Cooperation works to connect the universities of the Big Ten along with the University of Chicago. They had three librarians on staff with an average salary of \$96,940.

At Parkland Community College, librarians work a 215-day contract, which is 0.83 FTE. The faculty union represents them. There were 6 librarians, 4 full and 2 part-time. Librarians had up to 24 years experience. They earned an average salary of \$49,239.

Two public school districts serve Champaign-Urbana. There has been very little turnover, with most librarians at or near the top of scale. Both districts are unionized and one of them happens to have a school librarian who is the President of the teachers union. These librarians work 9-month contracts. For the purposes of this paper, a school contract of 9 months will be the same as an 11- or 12-month contract. Of course having the summers off creates opportunities to advance their career with additional education, which is easy to do in a university town, and most of the teachers have taken full advantage of this. With an existing salary scale that is the same as for all teachers, it is clear this additional education translates into more pay. The Urbana School District had 8 librarians, with an average salary of \$49,482. However, the average was skewed by so many at or near the top, with 27 years average experience. The Champaign School District had 14 librarians, with an average salary of \$45,440 and 16 years average experience level.

The Champaign-Urbana area is served by two fine public libraries, the Champaign Public

Library District (CPLD) and the Urbana Free Library (UFL), both city institutions. There is typically little turnover, as evidenced by most of the librarians being at the top of the scale. The CPLD has 27 librarians with 17 years of average experience. Their average salary was \$50,982. The UFL had 18 librarians with 19 years of average experience (a range of 4 to 38 years). UFL librarians' average salary in FY2003 was \$46,589.

The Lincoln Trail Library System (LTLS) is funded from grants from the Secretary of State's office and through funds appropriated by the Illinois General Assembly. There are 121 member libraries: 7 academic; 53 public, 45 school districts, 16 special libraries. The central office in Champaign employed 7 Librarians, with from 2 to 27 years of experience (12 average experience), and they earned an average of \$44,496.

Limitations of the Study

For the purposes of this study, only salary from FY2003 was considered. While benefits are an important part of any package, base salary is the most easily comparable aspect of a job offer. Benefits were excluded, as unfortunately, one size does not fit all when it comes to benefits. The benefit package of a particular job may trump salary considerations in certain circumstances. One case would be access to cheaper or onsite daycare, a great benefit for a young family. Thus, some may have access to generous benefits, whereas other employees would reap little from this benefit. Other than possibly having to cover for those who have sick children and have to be absent to take care of them, having daycare onsite does not directly benefit childless couples or singles.

Champaign-Urbana was the only area where the detailed data was gathered and from public institutions only, but the point is that one can locate the data in other cities if one exercises some

persistence and confidence to ask for it. There are a few special libraries in Champaign-Urbana, though most special librarians with an SLA affiliation still work for the university. Institutions such as the local newspaper, *The News-Gazette*, two hospitals, and a few other small organizations would have been included overall but salary information for them was unobtainable. The author recognizes private institution data is more challenging to obtain.

Questions for Further Research

What means might exist to prop up librarian salaries? How can money be funneled into the salary category without hurting another category? A source of information on public library salaries is the Federal-State Cooperative System for Public Library Data (FSCS).²⁴ This gathers data from over 9000 public libraries on all kinds of scales, from such things as circulation figures to expenditures, such as salary. Hennen's American Public Library Rating Index (HAPLR) is built from these figures. It is somewhat controversial because of the weighting given to various elements.²⁵ If the Hennen's American Public Library Rating Index is reliable, can a library trade index points for greater, more livable staff salaries? Can money be directed from services, such as say multiple copies of best sellers, toward salaries, without dire repercussions?

Another interesting idea to explore is what effect having a large library school in town might have on salaries. A public library director admitted national searches are no longer done for in his library because strong candidates are readily available. With little competition from good candidates outside the area, and such strong candidates from within the town already clamoring for each opening, the ability to "negotiate" a higher salary seems remote.

Conclusions

Salary surveys are very helpful when looking at the overall health for a profession, but they

are not very helpful in providing information for salary negotiations. Rarely are these numbers keyed in closely enough to the local market conditions to give one more than a vague, ballpark figure to work with. Commercial salary reports also provide information that is too generalized to be of real assistance to an applicant. However, if positions are in the public sector, a great deal of information can be obtained about an organization's salary structure which can provide the savvy job seeker a good understanding of how to proceed.

Hopefully over time, better librarian negotiations can result in higher wages. However, ultimately, it is up to the "powers that be" to use the tools available to advance librarian salaries. The main tool now would seem to be pay equity studies. This is a long term fight which will see some victories and a great deal of stonewalling from entrenched interests, since it is often seen as a zero sum game in these financially challenging times, if librarians win, other people lose. We are left to ponder the following quotes from David Orenstein, Manager of Libraries for Montgomery College in Maryland, "A willing manager can make a big difference in the pay of library workers...Library managers have the moral obligation to advocate for pay equity. This is not doing a good deed. It is about ensuring that staff can feed and care for themselves and their families and plan for a healthy retirement."²⁶

Portions of this paper were used for "Finding Local Library Salaries: Not Just Black Box Web Sites." *Library Worklife*, Statistics Section, February 2006. Accessed December 14, 2007 at:

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