

2017

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### Recommended Citation

Rebecca Bickford (2017) "An Analysis of LIS Job Postings in the United States," *SLIS Connecting*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.

DOI: 10.18785/slis.0602.07

Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/slisconnecting/vol6/iss2/7>

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# An Analysis of LIS Job Postings in the United States

By Rebecca Bickford

Master's Research Project  
May 2016  
Readers: Dr. Teresa Welsh  
Dr. Mathew Griffis

## Introduction

There have been many studies looking at library and information science (LIS) job advertisements. Countless job-seekers in the LIS field scan postings to identify which skill sets are the most sought-after in the workplace today. Many of the skills necessary to secure employment years ago are assumed today. Technology has changed the way we look at the work of libraries and librarians and the traditional curricula of the library and information science profession must be flexible and able to change as quickly as technology changes. Because of the technological transformation in the dissemination of information, the field of library and information science has evolved accordingly. Today's library graduates must be technology savvy in order to compete in the job market. According to the ALA website:

Graduating from an ALA-accredited program gives flexibility in the types of libraries and jobs you can apply for and enhances career mobility. Many employers require an ALA-accredited master's degree for professional level positions, and some states require an ALA-accredited degree to work as a professional librarian in public or school libraries. Accreditation of these programs is achieved through a review process that assures the program meets the Standards for Accreditation of Masters programs in Library and Information Studies. (2015, para. 2)

The purpose of the ALA-accredited library and information science program is to prepare students for jobs in library and information professions. This is achieved by curricula based on perceived needs of employers. The accreditation standards require that the curriculum is reviewed continuously and that evaluation of the curriculum involve those served by the program, including employers (Du, Stein, & Martin, 2007). LIS programs continually seek these data from advisory boards, focus groups, and surveys.

## Statement of Purpose

Through the use of content analysis, this research examined LIS job advertisements per region of the United States to determine which areas or specializations are sought in those specific regions. A comparison was made of the number of job advertisements to the number of ALA-approved LIS programs in the same region.

## Research Questions

- R1. What region of the United States has the most ALA-accredited LIS programs?
- R2. What region of the United States posts the most LIS job advertisements?
- R3. How many postings are there for each type of library?
- R4. Is an MLIS degree required for the job?
- R5. Is the advertised job an entry-level position?

## Definitions

*ALA*: American Library Association- The leading professional association of libraries and librarians in the United States (Reitz, 2016a).

*ALA Core Competencies*: Inventory of the basic knowledge to be possessed by all persons graduating from ALA-accredited programs in LIS, approved and adopted as policy in January 2010 by the Council of the ALA (ALA Core Competencies, 2016, para. 1)

*Entry Level*: Employment at the lowest grade in a system of classified positions, suitable for candidates who are beginning their careers and lack experience (Reitz, 2016b).

*LIS*: An abbreviation of library and information science and library and information studies (Reitz, 2016c).

*M.L.I.S.*: Masters of Library and Information Science (Reitz, 2016d).

*M.L.S.*: Masters of Library Science (Reitz, 2016e).

### ***Limitations of the Study***

Data collection was limited to job postings on *ALA JobList* during the frame of this study. Patterns observed in this study are valid only to the regions of the United States included in the study and limited to the six-week data collection period. Although the study provides a snapshot of what patterns exist at the time of the study, any patterns observed cannot be generalized to a larger geographic area or time frame.

### ***Assumptions***

It is assumed that job descriptions contained in advertisements and postings in this study reflect the skills, knowledge, and competencies required for the posted job completely and accurately. It is further assumed that the research design resulted in a reasonably representative sample of job postings in the selected regions of the country. It is also assumed that the list of ALA-accredited LIS programs is up to date and complete.

### ***Importance of the Study***

This research may help increase the awareness of the location and numbers of advertised library and information jobs as well as the proximity of these jobs to the ALA-accredited LIS programs. Findings may be of use to LIS educators, library education program administrators, and LIS graduates.

### ***Literature Review***

Graduates of an ALA-approved master's program in library and information science should acquire during their instruction a basic working knowledge of the Core Competencies of Librarianship (ALA, 2016). Included in these competencies are the foundations of the profession, an awareness of information resources, and familiarity with how knowledge and information are organized. Rebmann, Molitor, and Rainey (2012) state "the traditional role of the librarian has transitioned to provide greater access across multiple, complex contexts" (p. 102). The librarian must have a grasp of technology and possess basic skills related to how technology affects the dissemination of information. They must be able to relate to user's using the reference interview to provide needed guidance to seek sought information.

Librarians must have an understanding of the process of research, its value, and how it adds to the body of information. Librarians should be lifelong learners and should be reflected in the library atmosphere. And lastly, the librarian should have a basic understanding of the administration and management of the library.

White and Marsh (2006) stated that content analysis is a highly flexible research method that has been widely used in LIS studies with varying research goals and objectives. The research method is applied in qualitative, quantitative, and sometimes mixed modes of research frameworks and employs a wide range of analytical techniques to generate findings and put them into context. Using job advertisements as study data is a "time-honored methodology" according to Starr (2004, para. 6). Lewis (2002) states: "When a position in a library becomes available it is customary to advertise the position - very often in publications and sources that would ensure maximum exposure to potential applicants" (p. 719).

Most studies of job ads in the past tend to focus on specific job titles or positions. Lynch and Smith (2001) examined academic library job advertisements for the month of March in the years 1973, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998 comparing qualification requirements for the open positions during this 25-year period. Their findings indicated that computer skills, instructional technology skills, and interpersonal communication skills were common among all the job ads.

Gerolimos, Malliari, and Iakovidis (2015) investigated skills and qualifications of American librarians and found that an ALA-accredited degree was required 89.5 percent of the time in the job ads and the most offered position was "general and subject librarian" (p. 30). Grimes and Grimes (2008) found job openings requiring an MLS peaked in the early 1990's and there was a significant drop in the requirement beginning in the year 2000.

Other studies focused on how technology has impacted librarian qualifications.

Beile and Adams (2000) report that 83 percent of the position announcements in their study requested computer skills. In another study, Zhou (1996) found that in 1974, only 10.3 percent of job ads requested computer skills and by 1994 this request had grown to 88.9 percent. Applegate (2010) states, "Most librarian job ad studies are not qualitative but take a broadly quantitative approach, in which percentages of certain characteristics (such as job duties, required qualifications, and adjectives defining a position) are reported. Usually, the goal is to demonstrate the prevalence of a certain characteristic in a population" (p. 164).

### Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach as it involves looking for patterns of frequency when answering the research questions. Using the ALA website, a search was conducted to determine all of the ALA-accredited LIS programs in the United States. These programs were mapped on a United States map and a count of the programs was done for each region of the United States.

A search of the *ALA JobList* was conducted each week for six weeks. The first search yielded the most job advertisements and each week thereafter only new job advertisements were recorded. Each job advertisement was mapped on a United States map in the same manner as the ALA-accredited LIS programs.

Once the advertisements were mapped then a content analysis of the job advertisement was conducted answering the questions: where the job is located, in what type of library, is an MLS or MLIS required for the job, and if the position is entry-level. Data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and then analyzed using a descriptive statistical approach.

### Results

#### R1. What region of the United States has the most ALA-approved LIS programs?

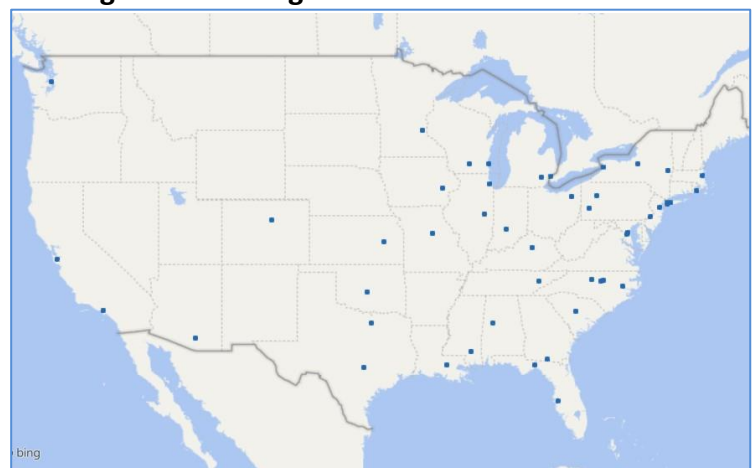
Figure 1 shows the location of all 50 ALA-approved LIS programs in the United States. Using the census regions, the United States is divided into four regions including Northeast, West, Midwest, and South.

The Northeast region includes the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. These states contain 13 colleges or universities with ALA-approved LIS programs, which is about 26 percent of the total number of LIS program institutions in the United States. The South region includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and the District of Columbia. These states contain 19 colleges and universities with ALA-approved LIS programs, accounting for 38 percent of the total programs in the United States.

The Midwest region consists of the following states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. These states are home to 12 colleges or universities with ALA-approved LIS programs, making up 24 percent of the total LIS program institutions in the United States. The West region includes the following states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. These states contain 6 colleges and universities with ALA-approved LIS programs, accounting for 12 percent of the total programs in the United States.

From this information, it can be stated that the southern region of the United States is home to the most ALA-approved LIS programs.

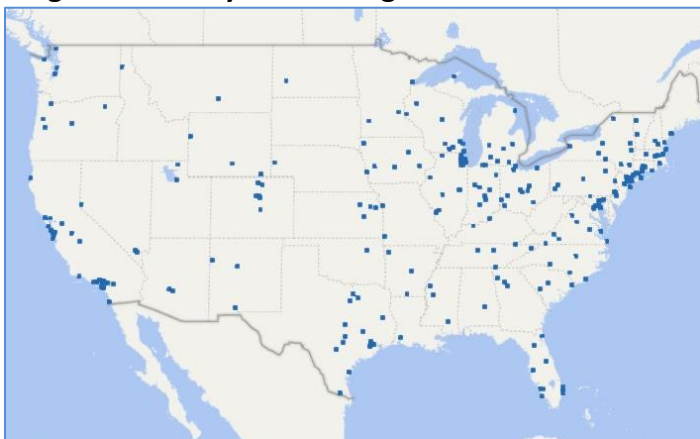
**Figure 1. LIS Programs in the United States**



**R2. What region of the United States posts the most LIS job advertisements?**

Figure 2 shows the location of the 417 of the 418 job postings found on the ALA JobList website for the approximate six weeks of data collection. One job had an unspecified location, as the employee would be working from their home. Looking at the map does not really tell which region of the United States has the most job postings, so again using the U. S. census regions, a count was made of job openings in each region. Table 1 shows the number of jobs in each region of the United States including the percentage of the whole number of jobs examined in this study. Again, from the data gathered in the examination of the job postings, the majority of job openings are in the southern region of the United States.

**Figure 2. Library Job Postings in the United States**



**Table 1. Job Postings by Region**

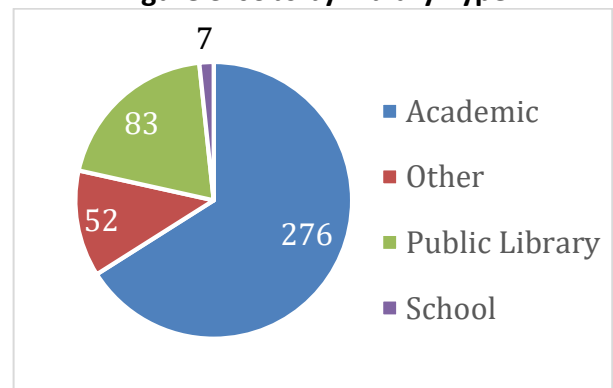
Region	States included in Region	# of Job Postings	% of Jobs
<b>South</b>	AL, AR, DC, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA	115	28 %
<b>Midwest</b>	IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, NE, ND, OH, WI	111	26 %
<b>Northeast</b>	CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT	96	23 %
<b>West</b>	AZ, CA, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY	95	23 %

**R3. How many postings are there for each type of library?**

Figure 3 shows the results of job listings by library type. The majority of job postings were for jobs in an academic library: 276 jobs accounted for 66 percent of the overall job postings. Eighty-three public library positions accounted for 20 percent of the job postings. Following closely was the 52 other library positions that account for 12 percent of the job postings. Included in these postings were jobs in associations, special libraries, and corporations.

The least number at two percent was the posting for jobs in school libraries. The total number of postings for school libraries was 7 job listings. By examining these results, it can be determined that most LIS job listings in this study are for positions in academia.

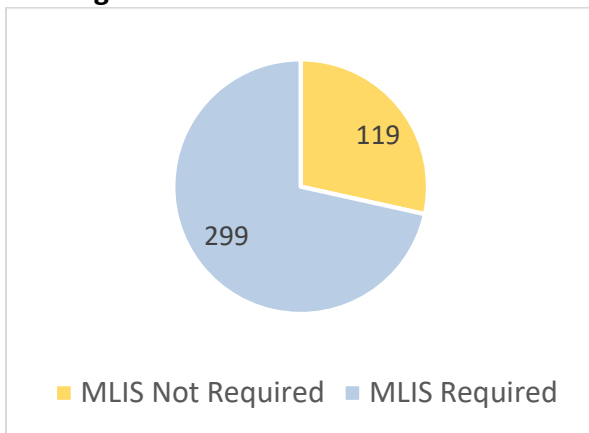
**Figure 3. Jobs by Library Type**



**R4. Is an MLIS degree required for the job?**

Figure 4 shows results of whether the job listing required a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree or not. Of the 418 total listings, 299 listings explicitly stated that the position required an MLIS degree and 119 either did not explicitly list the degree or did not require the degree. These data represent 72 percent and 28 percent of the total, respectively. Examining the job postings revealed that more traditional library roles required an MLIS degree, and the less traditional, more technological jobs did not necessarily require an MLIS degree.

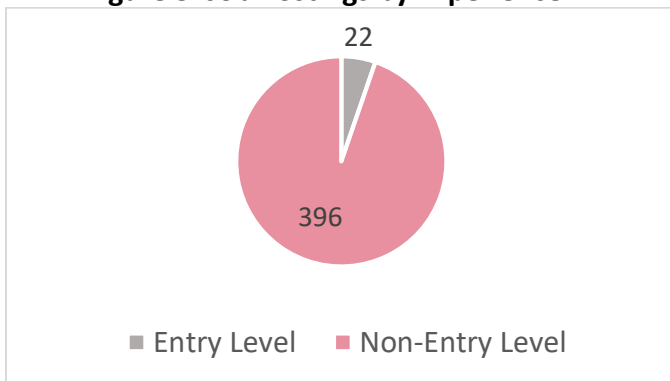
**Figure 4. MLIS or non-MLIS?**



**R5. Is the advertised job an entry-level position?**

New graduates looking to break into the field of library and information science are interested in the number of entry-level positions available at the time of graduation. Maatta (2007) states “Over the last several years there has been an entry-level gap as there are more LIS graduates than entry-level positions” (p. 30). Figure 5 shows the distribution of entry-level and non-entry-level jobs in the data set. The data showed that most job listings require some previous experience. Nonentry-level positions at 95 percent greatly outnumbered the entry-level positions at 5 percent, with 396 non-entry-level positions and 22 entry-level positions posted on the *ALA JobList*.

**Figure 5. Job Postings by Experience**



**Discussion and Conclusion**

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the employment prospects and basic job requirements for a soon-to-graduate MLIS student.

Where were the most LIS jobs located? During the time of this study, the southern region boasts the most ALA-accredited LIS programs, as well as the most job listings in the LIS field.

What types of libraries are currently searching for personnel? According to the postings in this study, academic libraries posted the most positions. This information could be helpful to college and university administrators when considering perspective new programs to add to the institution's offerings.

Is the MLIS degree still relevant? A previous study revealed, “the MLIS degree’s relative importance has declined over time, particularly in those areas of librarianship strongly impacted by structural change” (Grimes & Grimes, 2008, p. 338), but the findings of this study do not support that statement. The results of this study do support findings that library jobs are evolving from the more traditional roles to the more technological roles. This information could be of importance to LIS program administrators when considering adding new curriculum offerings and how the MLIS degree may need to change to meet the needs of the libraries of the future.

Further research could continue to examine the relationship of the location of LIS programs to the areas of the country with greater library personnel needs. Are there specific types of libraries in specific areas of the United States in need of personnel? Why or why not? Should LIS programs in specific areas of the United States teach to specific types of libraries?

Another area of future research could be an examination of why there seem to be so few entry-level positions in the library and information field. What makes a position entry-level as opposed to non-entry-level? What changes are needed to keep the MLIS degree relevant to most positions in the LIS field? When looking toward the future of the library and information field, further LIS research is needed to determine what knowledge and experience are needed for a successful career in librarianship and what skills are in demand in the job market.

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