

## The History and Future of the American Library Association Pay Equity Committee

By Casey Schacher

For almost two decades, the ALA Pay Equity Committee has worked to secure fair pay for library professionals. Created in 1986, its main objective is to advance ALA efforts to end unfair compensation practices that discriminate against women. Through education efforts and networking, the committee has motivated library workers across the nation to take control of their professional destinies. Even as the committee prepares to officially dissolve over the next year, it continues to make its mark through offshoot efforts that are inspired by the committee's work and dedication to pay equity.

While the committee has played an influential role in pay equity efforts for nearly 20 years, it had uncertain beginnings as the brainchild of former ALA President Elect, Dr. E.J. Josey, who suggested the idea of creating an ALA committee solely dedicated to protecting the professional rights of library workers. Despite skepticism from those who questioned the effectiveness of pay equity initiatives, he submitted the controversial proposal in 1984 to the ALA Executive Board for what would become the groundbreaking Commission on Pay Equity, later to be renamed the ALA Standing Committee on Pay Equity. The board approved this proposal on a temporary basis, giving the commission a two-year shelf life. Without yet realizing it, board members committed ALA to a long future of fighting for the professional rights of library workers.

Perhaps it took the right person to get such a committee off of the ground. Josey's epic personal history of protecting human rights as related to libraries foreshadowed his work at ALA for pay equity. An activist librarian and founder of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, he was rigorously involved in the 1960s civil rights movements and led a struggle that helped to end segregation in southern libraries.<sup>1</sup> He carried this level of achievement over into his efforts for pay equity and helped spark a flame of activism that was destined to spread to libraries around the nation.

The early days of the commission benefited from this bustling energy. Members organized the ALA Institute on Pay Equity, a pre-conference to the ALA Annual Conference in New York City. Top ranking library professionals, such as Norman Horrocks and Jenny Cooper, as well as influential speakers on pay equity, traveled hundreds of miles to gather and discuss the issue of compensation for library workers. Providing informational materials and a forum in which library workers could network individual efforts, the commission recruited delegates at the state and local levels to lobby for pay equity initiatives. The commission's pre-conference effectively organized various pay equity efforts and educated and connected individuals and groups who in turn took this knowledge back with them.

Though originally the commission was given a duration of only two years, its active members, including former chair Michele Leber, fought to keep the commission thriving. In 1986, Leber, along with others, petitioned the ALA Committee on Organization (COO) to grant the commission a permanent, standing status. "We felt there was still work to be done," Leber explained. Despite popularity of pay equity movements at the time, the COO met members of the commission with resistance. Hesitant to perpetuate a cycle of bureaucracy by creating another standing committee, the COO felt that they first needed to take a careful look at the value of the commission. Citing various statistics about the wage gap in the female-dominated field of librarianship, Leber, along with fellow members of the commission, continued to petition, even taking the fight to the Executive Council. "We told them that we ourselves wanted to put the commission out of commission. Unfortunately, there was a need for it," Leber said. Overcoming all obstacles, however, they eventually saw the realization of their hopes: the petition was approved. The Commission on Pay Equity became a standing organization and was officially renamed the Committee on Pay Equity, also known as the Pay Equity Committee.

- To keep the flame alive, ambitious goals for the committee were institutionalized. Its charge was to:
- Promote and advocate pay equity as it affects library workers, both to the profession and to outside groups;
- Act as a resource on the pay equity issue for the Association and its units;
- Support ALA representation and active involvement of the ALA Committee on Pay Equity in the [National Committee on Pay Equity](#) ; and

- Maintain an active network and database of resources that is made available to state and local groups in support of pay equity issues.<sup>2</sup>

The committee's accomplished these goals by continuing to inspire and inform future pay equity projects across the nation as well as by maintaining the critical network of people established in the commission's early years. The Committee kept in contact with and continued to educate individuals and groups that had pledged to act as delegates and spread awareness of pay equity initiatives. It also produced several books, manuals, and videos that have since inspired other publications, the more renowned of them being, *Pay Equity: An Action Manual for Library Workers*. According to Leber, the manual stands as the committee's "biggest legacy" for its influential impact on pay equity initiatives.

The manual, as well as other brochures and informational materials published by the committee, was regularly distributed at national, regional, and state conferences in an attempt to rally support amongst the library community. It has also provided source material for recent publications such as the Campaign for America's Librarians' *Advocating for Better Salaries and Pay Equity Toolkit*, a leading source for information on perpetuating pay equity initiatives for today's library workers.

Despite many solid achievements, the activity of the committee tapered off in the 1990s. This followed a trend away from pay equity advocacy that was seen across the nation as the women's movement was forced to defend gains in other areas, such as grass roots movements and the Beijing conference, and as unions turned to fight other battles.<sup>3</sup> Although the committee was still active, Leber explains that "the wheels were turning, but there wasn't a lot of forward movement." She attributes this decline in involvement to an increasingly complex world where those who could have empowered the pay equity movement were preoccupied. "People were just busy with other things," she said.

In recent years, however, pay equity has seen a rebirth at the ALA. In 2002, a new association, the American Library Association-Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA), emerged in hot pursuit of the ideals introduced by the Pay Equity Committee. This sister association to ALA was created for the purpose of promoting "the mutual professional interests of librarians and other library workers."<sup>4</sup> Amongst other duties, it is charged with offering direct support of pay equity initiatives through intensive public outreach.

It is this association that the Pay Equity Committee will trust with the mission of promoting pay equity in future years. As the ALA Pay Equity Committee transfers its duties over the next year to ALA-APA, it will work with the ALA-APA Standing Committee on Salaries and Status of Library Workers in order to ensure that all of the responsibilities, such as gender equity issues and representation to the National Committee on Pay Equity, will be upheld.<sup>5</sup> Leber expressed her mixed emotions on the change: "I would like nothing more than to have no need for the committee. But we need it...because we still have a wage gap."

With a diverse and ambitious history of activism that has inspired and directed modern efforts towards pay equity, the Pay Equity Committee helped to prepare the path for future advocates. While attention has been drawn away from the pay equity movement, the committee has helped to instill its ideals into the foundations of dedicated organizations like the ALA-APA. Through these merging organizations, the noble cause of promoting fair pay will live on.

1. "Civil Rights Activities," *University of Pittsburgh*, January 23, 2003, <http://www.sis.pitt.edu/~ejjosey/#civil> (accessed March 2, 2005).
2. "Committee on Pay Equity," *American Library Association*, <http://www.ala.org/ala/hrdr/about/hrdr/hrdrliasoncomm/committeeonpay/alacommittee.htm> (accessed March 2, 2005).
3. Hallock, Margaret. "Pay Equity: Did It Work?" *University of Oregon*, 1 June 2001, [http://uoregon.edu/~lerc/research/pay\\_equity.html](http://uoregon.edu/~lerc/research/pay_equity.html) (accessed March 17, 2005).
4. "About ALA-APA," *American Library Association- Allied Professional Association*, 2004, <http://www.ala-apa.org/about/about.html> (accessed March 2, 2005).
5. "American Library Association Committee on Organization: Report to ALA Council," *American Library Association*, January 19, 2005, <http://www.ala.org/ala/ourassociation/governance/council/councilagendas/midwinter2005a/CD27.doc> (accessed March 3, 2005).