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## Please Sir, Could I Have Some More? Part II

### Public Librarians and Salaries

By Tracey Simon

*This article is Part II of II. The first article appeared in April (v2n4).*

There are other, more pragmatic solutions. One is based on total compensation, an approach taken by the Kalamazoo Public Library in Michigan.<sup>15</sup> Total compensation takes in all elements of employee costs including salary steps, health benefits, social security, etc., and assigns a real dollar value to each. This compensation is then linked to library revenues. When revenues go up, the salaries, and/or an agreed upon portion of the benefits, would increase in value. Despite its fairness—it can be applied at all work levels—it has a downside: it doesn't address what happens should revenues decrease severely. Also, staff must understand that the cost of benefits and entitlement steps will be considered first, and that, in some years, they will possibly be paying for benefit increases by accepting lowering salary adjustments.<sup>16</sup>

A more effective way to raise salaries, or at least make a case for raising them, is to do a comparison study of how librarians' salaries stack up next to those in other fields that require similar education and training.<sup>17</sup> Most current studies merely compare salaries within an industry, thus creating a "market rate" salary. For example, to determine how much a reference librarian in Town X will make, comparisons are made to reference librarians in Towns Y and Z, which are similar in population size, demographics, and living conditions. What happens is that you are comparing two low salaries to come up with a third, either slightly higher or lower than, or in the middle of, those low salaries.<sup>18</sup>

An analogous occupation comparison study is what enabled librarians in New South Wales, Australia, to get a 26 per cent pay hike. In late 1996, the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission explored pay inequities between female- and male-dominated jobs. They scrutinized three occupational groupings and representative jobs: trade level (hairdressers), paraprofessional (childcare workers) and professional (librarians). For librarians, comparisons were made against other government employees, including psychologists, teachers, and geologists.<sup>19</sup> Results were posted in late 2002, and it was found that librarians were paid on average \$10,000 less than geologists, their closest counterpart in the study in terms of educational requirements. The lowest pay grade for librarians in New South Wales was \$A36,259 (about equal in purchasing power to \$36,259 in US dollars). This was more than the average starting librarian makes in the United States, and to add to the insult, librarians in New South Wales were, and are still, not required to have a Masters degree.<sup>20</sup>

Movement towards doing such a comparison here in the United States has begun. Past ALA President Maurice J. (Mitch) Freedman began an initiative in 2002 called "Campaign for America's Librarians," the goal of which was to raise awareness of what librarians do and why we deserve better pay. Of course, if what happened in Australia is any indication, the outcome should have been successful, and indeed it led to the creation of the ALA-Allied Professional Association, but it will take time to see improvements for the profession as a whole. So what do we do in the meantime?

While many in the profession feel that now is not the right time to ask for higher salaries because nearly everyone is feeling the effects of a tight economy, nearly all agree it is the right time to lay the groundwork for justifying an increase when the economy recovers. That groundwork includes educating the public about what librarians actually do and our value.

It was mentioned earlier that new MBAs are often offered salaries that are more than twice the salaries of new MLSs. Are new MBAs entitled to such high starting salaries because of the potential millions of dollars they could make for a company? Maybe it's a stretch, but shouldn't MLSs be entitled to at least the same because of the potential millions of

dollars they bring to society in the form of helping to create a literate workforce, providing information that is vital to businesses, assisting in research that can help find cures to disease, etc.? Perhaps we are denied such high salaries because our work is essentially invisible. As Robert F. Muir, an expert in business-to-business marketing, wrote

“A physicist may take eight years to formulate, and a biochemist one day to replicate, but a librarian can do ten years of research in an hour—that’s powerful! But does anyone out there *know* ?”<sup>21</sup>

According to Leslie Burger, director of the Princeton (N.J.) Public Library, past member of the American Library Association Task Force on Better Salaries and Pay Equity, and current member of the ALA-APA Standing Committee on the Salaries and Status of Library Workers,

Visibility is really important whether you are in an academic library, a school library, or a public library—making the library visible in the community so people will understand what the library does, what librarians do, and what people who work in libraries do. We need to be out there selling ourselves and selling all the services that the library can provide to a community.<sup>22</sup>

She asserts that we must promote both librarians and libraries because “the bottom line is that you can’t raise salaries if you don’t raise library budgets. Many community libraries are at the bottom of the pile in terms of public support. We need to somehow raise their value and the community’s willingness to fund library services.”<sup>23</sup>

### So how do we do this?

At the government level, we must insist upon hiring of only librarians with ALA-accredited degrees. According to the National Center for Education Statistics’ report, “Public Libraries in the United States,” less than half (46%) of all public libraries have librarians with ALA-accredited MLS degrees.<sup>24</sup> There should also be a push for up-to-date job descriptions. For example, the job descriptions for Librarians I and II on the [Nassau County \(Long Island, NY\) Civil Service Web page](#) have not been updated since 1984. Neither description includes knowledge of computers, electronic resources, nor any technology that has become part of our everyday work.

We must make it clear to the public and to those who set our salaries exactly what we do and that not everyone who works in a library is a librarian. Per the “Campaign for America’s Librarians,” the case should be made that librarians have advanced, specialized degrees and are experts in managing and making available information in an increasingly complex technological world; that we are leaders ... often on the front lines of (our) communities and campuses, defending freedom of speech and equal access to information.<sup>25</sup>

To accomplish this, *we must get out of the library* . Library directors should join local business associations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary or Kiwanis, and participate in the meetings, offering presentations on what the library can do for business. They can also become involved, if they are not already, in the local education associations or committees. Librarians can do topical talks at local senior centers, homemaker associations, houses of worship, etc., to explain what librarians do and what we and the library can do for them. We can offer local legislators our services to put together weekly or daily packets of articles on subjects of interest, and so on.

Library systems must also begin to generate media stories, such as how summer reading clubs help children maintain their reading skills, how libraries provide English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and literacy programs, how librarians defend free speech (I do hope Americans still value this), what common services are available (the value of inter-library loans), etc. Speaking to newspaper editorial boards about what continued budget cuts will do to libraries can also go a long way to raise awareness.

In other words, somewhat ironic for librarians, we must make some noise to hear some “ka-ching.”

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