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## Finding Local Library Salaries

### Not Just from Black Box Web Sites

By **Joseph R. Zumalt**

For most, the job seeking and negotiating salary and benefits process can seem like a daunting task. Naturally, people looking for work find it easy to first consult the Web.

Job posting and salary information can be accessed on several popular Web sites. Unfortunately, many library job notices simply mention something like “salary commensurate with education and experience.” The most commonly used tool in the salary negotiation toolkit is the salary survey. Several Web sites provide information on literally thousands of positions for thousands of different locations. However, having an average figure from a salary survey does not give one the information one needs to negotiate an individual salary in a larger organization. For example, a 23-year old new graduate librarian might be offered \$35,000, while on the same day a 55-year old Library Dean may be offered \$150,000 at the same institution. The average librarian salary may be \$70,000, but this figure provides no real useable information to either of these candidates. But where can one find information on local salary structures?

Raising library salaries is one of the primary reasons for the ALA-Allied Profession Association’s existence. Many recent, supportive editorials in the library literature have addressed the need for bringing librarian salaries into line with other higher-paid professions requiring the same level of education and experience. For example, the comparison is often made between the education and experience levels of librarians and city planners, commonly defined as pay equity. Many salary surveys have been conducted showing a great discrepancy between librarians and other similarly educated professions. A few administrators have been quite successful using this pay equity strategy in their organizations to raise compensation for library workers. However, in reality this is part of a long-term endeavor which involves multiple constituencies, some of whom may not see the need for raising library salaries. Unfortunately, in this time of budgetary crises, it is often perceived as a zero-sum game; if one group wins the other has to lose.

While this “macro strategy” of pay equity studies is an important strategy for the profession, individuals should pursue a “micro strategy,” educating themselves about their potential work environment and the city, state and region in which they live and work. Each job seeker should take a few relatively simple steps to discover what they might make as compensation in a given organization. These steps will be discussed later, but before proceeding further about how to discover library salary information, I would like to make several points. I believe it is clear that all librarians and library workers are underpaid. However, we need to get over our reticence about talking about salary. If we don’t know the facts, how can we possibly advocate for change? Plus, we need to know about individual salaries if we are ever going to be able to negotiate for more money, based on pay equity or by direct comparison within our own market. Survey information will not be specific enough to bolster individual salary negotiations. Information is power; we help others find and use it, we need to do it for ourselves as well.

For most, the job seeking and negotiating salary and benefits process can seem like a daunting task. 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. However, it is a time-consuming process. An entire day spent at the library may now sometimes be accomplished in a much shorter time on the Internet. Entrepreneurs have rushed in to fill the desire to give us this information quickly. Naturally, people looking for work find it easy to first consult the Web.

Job posting and salary information can be accessed on several popular Web sites. Sarah 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. 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*. *The Riley Guide* includes a section reporting an HR Professional’s evaluation of the

Salary.com Personal Salary Report. Unfortunately, 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.

The most commonly used tool in the salary negotiation toolkit is the salary survey. Several Web sites provide information on literally thousands of positions for thousands of different locations. The American Library Association and the Special Libraries Association have been conducting salary surveys for many years now. Aggregate salary information is relatively easy to produce. Anonymity is the reason many are prepared to reveal their salaries.

However, having an average figure from a salary survey does not give one the information one needs to negotiate an individual salary in a larger organization. For example, a 23-year old new graduate librarian might be offered \$35,000, while on the same day a 55-year old Library Dean may be offered \$150,000 at the same institution. The average librarian salary may be \$70,000, but this figure provides no real useable information to either of these candidates.

One important consideration when considering salary is factoring in the cost of living for the target area. Job searches in the same geographic 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 be able to live very well on \$40,000, whereas someone in the San Francisco Bay area may find \$60,000 barely sufficient to make ends meet. Tools such as the *ACCRA Cost of Living Index* produced by The Council for Community and Economic Research volunteers around the country can help provide important data.

Information on existing local salary conditions is an important first step in considering a salary offer. But where can one find information on local salary structures? For some jobs, this is fairly simple. Information about salaries at institutions which are publicly funded, such as most academic, school and public libraries, is usually publicly accessible. Some schools even publish them in their student newspaper. Some may have a publicly accessible 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.

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. 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 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 \$29.95. SalaryExpert.com offers a free Basic Salary Report. A 16 page Premium Salary Report is available from them for \$29, only four of which talk about a specific job in a specific place.

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, IL, 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, with half earning 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.”

To test the validity of the salary figures provided by these commercial reports, the author developed a spreadsheet by gathering salary and experience data for all of the library positions in the Champaign-Urbana (IL) area in FY2003. University of Illinois librarian salaries were obtained by consulting a public document on file at the central circulation desk, school library specialist salaries were obtained from a Web site providing freedom of information requests from all of the school districts in the state of Illinois, as well as through requests to the other organizations in town. It took approximately 50 hours to obtain salary detail for the entire town. Obviously, if someone needed information for just one organization, the time needed would be much less. The biggest challenge in locating this information is finding the right person, place or source to consult in your town.

Actual salary figures obtained for librarians in Champaign-Urbana paint a different picture than that given by the two commercial Web sites. Salary numbers were found for nearly all of these librarians. The average salary for this group was \$52,515. 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 \$43,150 and had 5 years average experience, Middle Career Librarians earned \$50,546 and had 15 years average experience, and Later Career Librarians earned \$60,630 and had 30 years average experience. Greater accuracy determining salary offers could be obtained of course by comparing an applicant with a current librarian in terms of level of education and experience and subject expertise.

The traditional tools used by individuals to gain salary information have now been also made available over the Internet, along with the same problems inherent in these tools, such as specificity and relevancy. Salary surveys are very helpful when looking at the overall health of a profession, but they are not very helpful in providing information for salary negotiations in a specific locale. 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. This study revealed a large gap between what two commercial Web sites suggested was the salary for a librarian in Champaign-Urbana and the actual market value. Fortunately, the figures given were on the low side. But how many potential future librarians might be scared off from applying in certain communities because of similar faulty data? Commercial salary reports, while not prohibitively expensive, contain mostly superfluous information that is too generalized to be of real assistance to an applicant. However, if library positions are at institutions in the public sector, a great deal of publicly-accessible information can be obtained about the organization's salary structure which can provide the savvy job seeker a good understanding of how to proceed.

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*Editor's Note – In the 2005 ALA Survey of Librarian Salaries, department heads at four-year colleges in the Great Lakes and Plains Region (includes Illinois) made an average of \$48,183. For universities, the average in the region was \$58,700. For beginning librarians at four-year colleges, the regional mean was \$35,917; for universities, it was \$39,407. No state-level data was available for Illinois.*

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