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Spotlight

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## National Librarians Association: Noteworthy Statements on Professionalism, Salaries, and Certification

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Questions have circulated about the National Librarians Association (NLA) on listservs and blogs as of late.<sup>1</sup> Mainly, interested individuals seek a better understanding of the organization's twenty-year existence from 1975–1995, and its concentration on librarians at work. NLA was created to champion librarians.

The National Librarians Association (NLA), founded by John T. Thomas, was one of the first independent organizations to recognize the need for national standards rather than state standards, believing they would increase professionalism. Since every librarian would follow the same criteria and guidelines, there would be no question of what skills were necessary for what occupational level.

Although there are many differences between the ALA-Allied Professional Association: the Organization for the Advancement of Library Employees, and what the NLA set out to do, the most striking is the proposed means of certification. The NLA organized a board of five members to review applicants for two types of certification: regular and advanced. Qualifications included a minimum 5 years experience, and a master's degree in library and information science, 1000+ hours of “professional work experience” within the five years after receiving certification, and evidence of continuing education. From my research, however, it seems as though the NLA did not have any continuing education opportunities.

Although the NLA was highly optimistic in writing, the organization did not fair well, and eventually disintegrated. At its height, there were 1500 members. Auld recalls: “the problem was interest. Some people had interest, others not enough. Some saw it as not providing enough benefit to them to be worth the effort. NLA was not in a position to deliver increased salaries, or change working conditions.” Inevitably, the association did not have official power to make visible changes, and was therefore unable to sustain credibility and fulfill the goals set forth to address.

However, one should remember this association as one of the pioneer organizations that sought to change the status of library workers.

To gain a better understanding of the NLA, I requested the organization's source documents from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), and interviewed Associate Professor Emeritus Dr. Lawrence Auld, past president of the National Librarians Association, who generously donated the papers to UIUC to be used for research. Poignant statements about librarian professionalism earmark nearly every page, and every minute of the interview. In an effort for this organization to not be forgotten, I have compiled a list of what I consider to be the best quotes about the need for national certification, competitive salaries, and competencies, as many of these values hold true for ALA-APA.

On Professionalism:

1. *[NLA] shall be conducted as a non-profit corporation to promote librarianship, to develop and increase the usefulness of libraries, to cultivate the science of librarianship, to project the interest of professionally qualified librarians, to foster a spirit of cooperation among members of the profession, and to perform any other functions necessary for the betterment of the professionalism of librarianship.* – Constitution, National Librarians Association, 1976.
2. *It will function as an association of librarians rather than as an association of libraries.* – Constitution, National Librarians Association, 1976.
3. *Librarians have the right to status within their institutions or jurisdictions that are comparable to the status granted to other professionals in their institutions or jurisdictions with comparable training and experience.* – PWC Statement on the Welfare of Librarians, January 1982.

On Salaries:

4. *Librarians should be evaluated objectively, equitably, and openly on their professional performance under clear, orderly, and documented procedures.* — PWC Statement on the Welfare of Librarians, January 1982.
5. *NLA advocates the provision of national salary scale surveys for librarians entering the profession and urges professional placement centers to provide copies of such surveys to those advertising positions and to prospective employees.* – PWC Statement on the Welfare of Librarians, 1982.

On Certification:

6. *The National Librarians Association believes that part of the process of establishing professional standards is to encourage continuing education and professional activity for librarians.* — National Board of Certification for Librarians: A Draft Proposal, 1982.
7. *The National Librarians Association, recognizing that consensus does not exist among librarians on the utility of librarian certification, hereby places itself on record as supporting the need for a national system of certification for the practitioner in library and information service at the professional level.* – National Board of Certification for Librarians: A Draft Proposal, 1982.
8. *Certification standards can be used to determine responsibilities in job classification. By establishing such basics, the criteria for professional job classifications can be more easily identified and can offer considerable insight into the classification requirements for non-professional performance in library and information agencies.* — Position Statement on Certification of the Professional in Library and Information Services.
9. *The idea of certifying librarians actually is not that new. It has had been around for a long time. It is an idea that re-emerges in every generation, but every generation thinks it is a new idea. Some of those differences do make it new.* —Lawrence Auld, Interview, 2006.

1. History Librarian, The. “National Librarians Association” 15 Jun 2006.  
<http://historylibrarian.wordpress.com/tag/apal/>

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