

Qualifications Sought by Employers of Health Sciences Librarians, 1977-1978

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ABSTRACT

A content analysis of health sciences library positions available in 1977-1978, as advertised in the *MLA News*, presents the professional requirements sought by employers of applicants. Data for 414 advertised positions were coded and are displayed in nine tables. Variables selected from the range of positions advertised include: type of position, years of experience, subject background, Medical Library Association certification, and on-line experience. Geographic distribution of jobs is also given.

TO ASCERTAIN the qualifications desired of health sciences librarians by employers, the Positions Available section of the *MLA News* was examined for the period 1977-1978. Although this is not the only medium used by employers for advertising vacant positions, it is probably the major employment source in health sciences librarianship and was, therefore, the only source selected for content analysis for this paper.

After elimination of duplicate advertisements, each job listing was manually coded into classifications according to categories determined in a preliminary sample. The variables noted were: type of position, state in which the position occurred, years of experience required, preferences for subject background in addition to the M.L.S., Medical Library Association (MLA) certification requirements, reference to health sciences library education courses, on-line experience with NLM data bases, and OCLC experience. The data were then tabulated for analysis. Because of the variety of institutions that use the *MLA News* for advertising job opportunities and because of the combinations of duties which may be assigned to a given position by a library, the authors may have

assigned classifications somewhat arbitrarily in some few cases. Infrequently a specific requirement for a position was not tabulated because it was unique or was clearly related to the type of position: for example, travel requirements for extension library positions. These limitations notwithstanding, an indication of trends and requirements sought of job applicants by prospective employers in health sciences librarianship is shown from the classifications selected for this study.

Within these two years 414 health sciences library positions were advertised in the *MLA News*. Table 1 shows the types and numbers of positions advertised. These listings reflect offerings for health sciences librarianship positions exclusively, since only two non-health sciences positions were advertised in 1977 and 1978. Reference positions account for over one-quarter (27.8%) of all positions advertised. Public service positions amount to 37.9% of all positions advertised, while 22.5% are technical service positions. The vast majority of advertised positions are in academic health sciences libraries; only 10.6% of the positions are for specialized libraries such as hospital, pharmacy, dental, or veterinary medical libraries.

Of the 414 positions advertised, only seven were from outside the United States. Three were from Canada, and four were from other foreign countries. Table 2 indicates the distribution of the 407 positions in the United States by RML region. It is not easy to account for the wide range, 1.5%-16.7%, of distribution within the regions. Region VII, which has the highest percentage of positions, includes Chicago, the site of MLA Headquarters, and the states immediately surrounding; the other high-percentage regions are on the east and west coasts and are similarly centered around large

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TABLE 1

NUMBER AND TYPES OF POSITIONS ADVERTISED IN *MLA NEWS*, 1977-1978
(N = 414)

Type of Position	No. of Times Advertised	%
Reference	115	27.8
Administration	46	11.1
General technical services	36	8.7
Cataloging	33	8.0
Hospital	33	8.0
General public services	31	7.5
Audiovisual	28	6.8
Extension	25	6.0
Acquisitions	12	2.9
Serials	12	2.9
Clinical medical librarian	9	2.2
History of medicine	7	1.7
Pharmacy	7	1.7
Circulation	6	1.4
Interlibrary loan	5	1.2
Veterinary medical	3	0.7
Dental, document, indexing, library science faculty, OCLC coordinator, systems (one each)	6	1.4
Total	414	100.0

metropolitan areas. A reference to those states which have job lines, as listed in the *MLA News*, does not help to explain this distribution pattern. Since all regions do not have an equal number of health sciences libraries, health sciences library manpower needs vary from region to region.

TABLE 2

NUMBER AND DISTRIBUTION, BY RML REGIONS, OF POSITIONS ADVERTISED IN *MLA NEWS*, 1977-1978
(N = 407)

Region	No. of Positions	%
I	18	4.4
II	35	8.6
III	12	2.9
IV	53	13.0
V	32	7.9
VI	40	9.8
VII	68	16.7
VIII	43	10.6
IX	54	13.3
X	6	1.5
XI	46	11.3
Total	407	100.0

TABLE 3

TOTAL POSITIONS ADVERTISED IN *MLA NEWS*, 1977-78: AMOUNT OF EXPERIENCE REQUIRED
(N = 414)

Amount of Experience	No. of Positions	%
None indicated	164	39.6
Preferred or desired	30	7.2
Required	17	4.1
1 year or 1+	33	8.0
2 years or 2+	77	18.6
3 years or 3+	55	13.3
4 years or 4+	11	2.7
5 years or 5+	27	6.5
Total	414	100.0

Table 3 displays the years of experience sought of applicants for the positions advertised. The terminology is that requested by the prospective employers in their respective ads, except for a few cases when the authors had to be subjective in classifying. In all tables those requirements stated in terms of *desired* or *preferred* are reported together, separating these from the times when *required*. Among the positions 39.6% were advertised as entry-level positions with no experience required. A specific number of years of experience was mentioned as being required in 49.1% of the ads. The remaining 11.3% of the ads asked for experience in general terms as being preferred, desired, or required.

The special experience or training requirement that was most frequently requested in the advertisements was for National Library of Medicine

TABLE 4

TOTAL POSITIONS ADVERTISED IN *MLA NEWS*, 1977-78: TYPES OF EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING REQUIRED
(N = 414)

Experience and Training Requested	Preferred or Required	Total	%	
NLM on-line experience	78	76	154	37.2
Subject background	63	30	93	22.5
Certification	50	33	83	20.0
Courses in health sciences librarianship	18	21	39	9.4
OCLC experience	28	11	39	9.4

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TABLE 5
 REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICES POSITIONS ADVERTISED IN *MLA NEWS*, 1977-1978
 (N = 157)

	Reference	ILL	Circulation	General Public Service	Total	%
Experience						
None	50	2	4	8	64	40.8
Preferred or desired	10			3	13	8.3
Required	3			2	5	3.2
1 year or 1+	13	2	1	9	25	15.9
2 years or 2+	22	1		3	26	16.6
3 years or 3+	11		1	2	14	8.9
4 years or 4+	5			4	9	5.7
5 years or 5+	1				1	0.6
Total	115	5	6	31	157	100.0
Certification						
Preferred or desired	18			4	22	14.0
Required	11	1	1	4	17	10.8
Health sciences courses						
Preferred or desired	10		1		11	7.0
Required	3	1	1	3	8	5.1
Subject background						
Preferred or desired	27		2	2	31	19.7
Required	16			3	19	12.1
NLM on-line experience						
Preferred or desired	38	2	1	7	48	30.6
Required	49			6	55	35.0
OCLC experience						
Preferred or desired		1			1	0.6
Required						

TABLE 6
 REQUIREMENTS FOR THE TECHNICAL SERVICES POSITIONS ADVERTISED IN *MLA NEWS*, 1977-1978
 (N = 93)

	Acquisitions	Cataloging	Serials	General Technical Services	Total	%
Experience						
None	6	15	6	10	37	39.8
Preferred or desired	1	5	1	4	11	11.8
Required		2		1	3	3.2
1 year or 1+	2		1	1	4	4.3
2 years or 2+	2	7	3	5	17	18.3
3 years or 3+	1	4	1	9	15	16.1
4 years or 4+				1	1	1.1
5 years or 5+				5	5	5.4
Total	12	33	12	36	93	100.0
Certification						
Preferred or desired		4	3	5	12	12.9
Required	1	3		1	5	5.4

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TABLE 6 (Cont.)

	Acquisitions	Cataloging	Serials	General Technical Services	Total	%
Health sciences courses						
Preferred or desired	1	1			2	2.1
Required		2			2	2.1
Subject background						
Preferred or desired	3	3	2	3	11	11.8
Required		3			3	3.2
NLM on-line experience						
Preferred or desired	1	6	1	6	14	15.0
Required	1	1	1	1	4	4.3
OCLC experience						
Preferred or desired	2	12	2	10	26	27.8
Required	1	4		5	10	10.7

TABLE 7

REQUIREMENTS FOR HOSPITAL, PHARMACY, VETERINARY MEDICAL, AND DENTISTRY LIBRARY POSITIONS
 ADVERTISED IN *MLA NEWS*, 1977-1978
 (N = 44)

	Hospital	Pharmacy	Veterinary Medical	Dental	Total	%
Experience						
None	14	3	1	1	19	43.2
Preferred or desired	2		1		3	6.8
Required	1	1			2	4.5
1 year or 1+	3				3	6.9
2 years or 2+	8				8	18.2
3 years or 3+	4		1		5	11.4
4 years or 4+		2			2	4.5
5 years or 5+	1	1			2	4.5
Totals	33	7	3	1	44	100.0
Certification						
Preferred or desired	4	1	2		7	15.9
Required	4				4	9.1
Health sciences courses						
Preferred or desired	2				2	4.5
Required	1				1	2.3
Subject background						
Preferred or desired	4	3		1	8	18.2
Required	2	2	1		5	11.4
NLM on-line experience						
Preferred or desired	4	1			5	11.3
Required	7	3	1		11	25.0
OCLC experience						
Preferred or desired	1				1	2.3
Required						

(NLM) on-line experience. This was most often a requirement for reference or cataloging positions, but was mentioned in a variety of other ads. Certification, courses in health sciences librarianship, subject background, or OCLC experience were the other special requirements mentioned frequently enough to warrant coding. Other requirements mentioned were foreign languages, state certificates, Ph.D. degrees, audiovisual experience, knowledge of MeSH and the NLM classification, and availability for travel. Usually these requirements were limited to a specific position. Table 4 displays special requirements requested and, following the wording of the ad, mentions them as being preferred and desired or required.

It is interesting to note that the authors' original purpose in writing this paper was to examine the extent to which MLA certification was or was not a factor in health sciences library employment. Certification alone, however, proved to be inadequate

as a basis for a study, as only 83 of the 414 advertisements mentioned MLA certification. This is only 20% of the total advertisements, and of this number only 8% stated that certification was required. On the other hand, 39.6% of the ads required no experience, 8% asked for one year or one year plus, and 18.6% asked for two years or two years plus. Assuming that the 11.3% which mentioned experience as being preferred, desired, or required were for higher level positions, 66.2% of the positions were entry level or required a minimum of two years of experience. These are the positions for which one might expect certification to be mentioned, since the new code was designed with entry-level librarians in mind. Certification was not always required in conjunction with entry-level positions since a few positions requiring four or more years of experience also requested certification as a requirement. Both subject background and NLM on-line experience were consid-

TABLE 8
REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMINISTRATION, AUDIOVISUAL (AV), EXTENSION, CLINICAL MEDICAL LIBRARIAN (CML), AND HISTORY OF MEDICINE POSITIONS ADVERTISED IN *MLA NEWS*, 1977-1978
(N = 120)

	Administration	AV	Extension	CML	History of Medicine	Other
Experience						
None	22	5	7	4	5	
Preferred or desired	1	2	2			1
Required		5		2		
1 year or 1+	2	3	2		1	
2 years or 2+	3	7	8			2
3 years or 3+	7	4	4	3	1	1
4 years or 4+	1					
5 years or 5+	10	2	2			1
Total	46	28	25	9	7	5
Certification						
Preferred or desired	3	5		1		
Required	3		3	1		
Health sciences courses						
Preferred or desired	3					
Required	1	1	3	5		
Subject background						
Preferred or desired	7	2	2	1	1	
Required	1	1				1
NLM on-line experience						
Preferred or desired	5	1	4	1		
Required	2		4			
OCLC experience						
Preferred or desired						
Required	1					

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TABLE 9
EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS BY NUMBER OF POSITIONS ADVERTISED
IN *MLA NEWS*, 1977-1978
(N = 414)

Type of Position	NLM On-Line Experience		Subject Background		MLA Certification		Health Sciences Library Courses		OCLC Experience	
	Pre-ferred/Desired	Re-quired	Pre-ferred/Desired	Re-quired	Pre-ferred/Desired	Re-quired	Pre-ferred/Desired	Re-quired	Pre-ferred/Desired	Re-quired
Reference	38	49	27	16	18	11	10	3		
Interlibrary loan	2					1		1	1	
Circulation	1		2			1	1	1		
General public services	7	6	2	3	4	4		3		
Acquisitions	1	1	3		1	1	1		2	1
Cataloging	6	1	3	3	4	3	1	2	12	4
Serials	1	1	2		3				2	
General technical services	6	1	3		5	1			10	5
Hospital	4	7	4	2	4	4	2	1	1	
Pharmacy	1	3	3	2	1					
Veterinary medical		1		1	2					
Dental			1							
Administration	5	2	7	1	3	3	3	1		1
Audiovisual	1		2	1	5			1		
Extension	4	4	2			3		3		
Clinical medical librarian	1		1		1	1		5		
History of medicine			1							
Other				1						
Total	78	76	63	30	50	33	18	21	28	11

ered to be more important than certification. On-line experience, NLM and OCLC, was requested in 46.6% of the advertisements. Table 4 indicates that employers considered certification and health sciences library education to be of far less importance than on-line experience and a subject background.

Tables 5-8 show the preferred, desired, or required years of experience and the special experience and training requirements for each of the 414 positions by major categories. These categories are

public service positions, technical service positions, hospital and other special library positions, and the other positions detailed in Table 1.

Table 9 gives details on the NLM on-line experience, subject background, MLA certification, health sciences library education, and OCLC experience by the type of position for which each was a requirement.

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