



How Goes the Law Librarian Job Market?

A Sign of the Times: More Jobs, Fewer Qualified Candidates, Better Pay

by Paul Healey

The current state of the law librarian job market appears to be a mixed bag. The good news is that the economic recession doesn't seem to be hindering the number of jobs available in the profession. Job openings and higher salaries abound in academic, private and government law libraries. The bad news is law library administrators deem many candidates unqualified for many of the vacancies.

Many Jobs, Few Candidates

Overall, the widespread perception is that there are more law library openings than qualified candidates for those openings. According to AALL figures, job postings have typically outnumbered registered candidates at the AALL Annual Meeting employment clearinghouse: In 2001, employers posted 61 openings and 40 candidates registered; in 2000, 88 positions were offered, but only 50 candidates registered. The American Library Association, which has experienced a similar situation, notes that this is a relatively new development for ALA. At the ALA 2001 Midwinter Meeting in Washington, D.C., there were 831 openings compared to 260 job seekers; in 1997, 360 openings and 436 job seekers.

Do such disparities in numbers of candidates and openings really indicate a problem? In a study published in the Winter 2001 issue of *Law Library Journal*, Beatrice Tice concluded that the job environment for law librarians is fairly stable, with a steady number of law library jobs available, and both the number and quality of applicants stable as well. Tice suggests that a number of factors may account for the fact that there appear to be fewer candidates than job openings — for example, not all law library job candidates use the Annual Meeting employment clearinghouse.

However, the state of the job market ebbs and flows depending on a number of personal and professional factors, says Philleatra Gaylor, director of library services at McLane Graf Raulerson & Middleton in Manchester, N.H. "It depends upon the type of position one is seeking. Fewer director-level positions are available as opposed to other positions like reference librarian, electronic services librarian or cataloger," Gaylor says. "Also one's outlook on the job market depends upon whether that person is willing to relocate. For a person willing to relocate, the job market is much better as the pool of jobs expands."

Retirements Play a Role

Forecasting the job outlook for the library profession as a whole paints an interesting picture. On the one hand, the U.S. government's 2002–03 *Occupational Outlook Handbook* concludes that employment of librarians will grow more slowly than the average for all occupations over the 2000–10 period. That seems to indicate that even if there are now more jobs than applicants, the situation won't last. However, the entire library profession, including law librarianship, faces a tidal wave of retirements. According to the ALA Web site, "more than one-quarter of all librarians with master's degrees will reach the age of 65 before 2009. [These] data do not take into account early retirement, death or other reasons for leaving the profession before the age of 65." The problem of impending librarian retirement is so acute that the Bush administration has included \$10 million in its proposed 2003 budget for training and recruiting new librarians.

Law librarians are just as concerned about how retirement will hamper the profession. "In the long term, I worry that there won't be enough people to replace the baby boomers when they start to retire — particularly in technical services," says Morgan Wilson, a new reference librarian at Hamline University School of Law in Saint Paul, Minn. "If this happens, I could imagine difficult-to-fill professional positions being outsourced or eliminated. On the other hand, it is impossible to know how demographics within the profession are going to interplay with technology and other external factors. We all know about being prepared for constant, and often unexpected, change."

Views from the Recruitment Trenches

Law librarians who are responsible for hiring do indeed sense that there are fewer qualified applicants than open positions for entry- and mid-level jobs. In some cases, applicants will lack the required educational background for the position or will not have enough experience to succeed. For example, law libraries often receive applications from lawyers who wish to leave the practice of law but have no library training or experience.

Nina Platt, director of library services for Fagre & Benson in Minneapolis, says that filling recent openings was challenging. She found the pool of candidates inadequate, and this caused problems in filling the position. "There are more openings for librarians than there are qualified

candidates to fill the positions," Platt says. "Many of the librarians who applied and some I interviewed did not have the technical qualifications for the positions."

On the other hand, job seekers are understandably enjoying the current employment climate. Sheri Lewis recently left the Mercer University Law Library to assume the position of librarian for public services at the University of Chicago Law Library. During her job search, Lewis easily obtained interviews with potential employers. "It is a sufficiently slanted buyers' market, and employers may need to look at more candidates for any one opening," Lewis says.

Wilson, however, discovered that his foreign credentials kept potential employers at bay. "In my first job search, I obtained a special librarian position before I found a law library position," Wilson explains. "I had been a very recent graduate and had just relocated from Australia. Outside of the friendly foreign, comparative and international law milieu, it is not always helpful to have foreign qualifications and experience in a law library. There is a legitimate concern that you might not know much about U.S. legal research."

After showcasing his abilities at his first job, Wilson's second job search, which led to his current job at Hamline, proceeded more smoothly than the first. "It wasn't exactly easy — there were still uncertainties and a substantial amount of work involved — but it was a lot easier and faster than my first job search," Wilson says. "I did my job search just before the recession seemed to make an impact. At that time, the job market was quite good for what I was looking for, [positions in] academic law libraries or government special libraries, even better than it had been a few years before."

Although there are plenty of openings at all levels of law librarianship, the shortage of qualified applicants is most acute with entry-level positions.

"I think that the state of the job market is excellent for new law librarians. There are appreciably more jobs for newer or entry-level librarians, and a much greater variety, than when I was entering the field in the early '90s," Lewis says. "By comparison, the job market is more competitive for middle-level managers and directors. But there are still opportunities for advancement, especially if the job seeker does not have limited geographic constraints."

To obtain better job candidates, Platt insists that law librarians need to vigorously recruit new people from various disciplines into the profession.

"We need to be more active in the library schools and more open to new members in our local chapters. We also need to work at placing some articles about the opportunities within the profession in both legal and nonlegal publications. We need to become more visible as a profession," Platt says. "Perhaps AALL needs a staff position or consultant who focuses primarily on marketing the profession to the rest of the world."

Salary Changes Among Law Librarians

Reader Services Librarians

% Salary Change	'93 to '97	'97 to '01
All RS librarians at all libraries	3.8%	24.3%
Academic	12.6%	19.2%
Firm/Corporate	5.7%	29.7%
State/Court/County	-14.6%	40.7%

New Librarians

All Library Types	No Data	34.3%
Academic	No Data	30.2%
Firm/Corporate	No Data	34.48%
State/Court/County	No Data	20.9%

Technical Services Librarians

% Salary Change	'93 to '97	'97 to '01
All TS librarians at all libraries	9.1%	19.5%
Academic	14.5%	16.0%
Firm/Corporate	15.6%	20.7%
State/Court/County	-5.8%	30.6%

New Librarians

All Library Types	No Data	6.7%
Academic	No Data	27.6%
Firm/Corporate	No Data	6.7%
State/Court/County	No Data	44.8%

Law Library Directors

% Salary Change	'93 to '97	'97 to '01
All directors at all libraries	17.9%	26.9%
Academic	17.6%	21.3%
Firm/Corporate	9.5%	28.3%
State/Court/County	5.6%	23.8%

Pay Scales Affect, Reflect Market

Salaries can have a huge effect on recruiting new people to the profession. They can also indirectly reflect the state of the job market, and the profession itself. Law librarian salaries are on the rise — mostly because they need to. Every law library position requires a candidate with an M.L.S., and some openings prefer a law degree as well. The exorbitant educational costs of preparing for a career in law librarianship demands higher compensation. While many law

librarians admit the salary situation is better, it's still a matter of concern.

"From the hearsay I have heard, salaries have been rising in firms in the Twin Cities. I doubt that much of this will trickle down to academic libraries, although they do seem better than they did a few years ago," Wilson says. "I still don't think that law library salaries are adequate when compared with similar positions in other special libraries, especially when taking into account the cost of [getting] a J.D. here."

"My perception is that salaries are not rising fast enough to attract a sufficient number of new librarians to the field," Lewis says. "We may never get paid our worth, and the law library environment compensates for that. But we need to continue to challenge our environments to compensate us better."

"I feel that salaries are low or flat in comparison with other professions that require master's level degrees for entrance into the profession," Gaylor says. "The higher salaries are basically reserved for law librarians at the director level, but compensation can be adequate depending upon one's credentials, experience and geographic location."

Regardless of their adequacy, law library salaries have shown some dramatic rises between 1997 and 2001, according to AALL's *Biennial Salary Survey*.

On average, salaries for reader services librarians, technical services librarians and law library directors showed gains across all library types between 1993 and 1997 — from a high of 18 percent for directors to a low of 4 percent for research services librarians. But their fate within specific library types varied considerably. Research services librarians suffered the lowest "increases" at each library type, and even fell close to 15 percent at state, court and county libraries. State, court and county libraries also accounted for directors' lowest percentage increase, 6 percent.

The situation brightened between 1997 and 2001, with no declines and overall increases of 19 percent or more for all three positions among established librarians — and close to 27 percent for directors. The salary picture within specific library types was also strong, with a minimum increase of 16 percent (for technical services librarians at academic libraries).

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New librarians — those with two years or less of experience — fared well, too. In particular, technical services librarians overall received a near 7 percent salary increase across all library types between 1997 and 2001, with a dramatic 45 percent jump at state, court and county libraries. However, except for state, court and county libraries, new research librarians fared better, seeing an average gain of 34 percent across library types.

Platt concurs that salaries are on the way up for those well versed in library technology, based on the yearly market analysis conducted by Fagre & Benson's Human Resources department. "The biggest increases in salary have been for positions that have technical responsibilities, such as electronic services librarian or technical services librarian," Platt says.

Are these salary hikes the result of a perceived or real increase in demand for

qualified applicants? It is impossible to say for sure. Though the increases seem to correlate with the period when concerns about the issue were first raised, it is impossible to account for other possible causes, including the boom economy of those years. In addition, the salary survey itself, while a helpful tool, may not contain the breadth of data required to make broad industry-wide conclusions about salaries.

The Good, the Bad, the Future

The fact remains: Qualified law librarian candidates are reveling in a job market boasting more open positions and higher salaries than ever before. However, even if pay is going up, salaries need to rise further to attract and retain qualified members of the profession. The long-term consequences of fewer qualified candidates on the law librarian horizon do not bode well for the profession.

"Like any other profession, if [law librarianship] is to survive, recruitment should be an ongoing effort," Gaylor says.

At a time when many industries are facing layoffs, the situation for law librarians is perhaps enviable. Still, if a shortage of library workers becomes acute, it will be more difficult for libraries to accomplish their missions. All law librarians should be doing what they can to recruit new members to the profession. At least they can say with confidence that there are jobs to be had.

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