

U of A SLIS Employment Survey of 2010 Graduates

During February–March 2012, the School conducted its 23rd annual employment survey of graduates of the Master of Library and Information Studies program at the University of Alberta. The response rate was 40% (18 of 45 MLIS graduates), the same as 2009 but lower than earlier years. Some caution should be exercised in generalizing from the survey results. The 2010 survey was conducted some 20 months after the spring class convoked, with a small number of fall 2010 graduates also included.

Summary

Seventeen of the 18 reporting graduates in 2010 (94%) said they were employed in library and information services at some point since graduation; all were still working. However, three-quarters had changed positions by the time of the survey, a similar proportion to the 2009 cohort, suggesting a somewhat unstable job market. In fact, 2 graduates reported having had three placements each and another 3 had held four jobs.

To the extent the survey data may be compared over time, salaries of 2010 graduates have remained flat over those of 2009 and 2008 graduates. Median earnings were \$55,500 (mean \$53,450) for 10 graduates in 2010 holding full-time permanent positions. The median salary for 4 comparable graduates in 2009 was \$45,591, and it was \$55,574 for 20 comparable graduates in 2008, revealing that 2010 graduates earned \$74 less per year than the 2008 cohort. Half of the 2010 reporting graduates listed Edmonton as home, the same as for 2009.

Post-secondary institution libraries accounted for 28% of placements among 2010 graduates at the time of the survey, while 3 were in records management units, 2 each were in special libraries, school libraries, archives, and not-for-profit units, and 1 each were in a public library and in a research unit. This is quite a different sectoral configuration than reported by 2008 graduates, with 10 placements in post-secondary institution libraries and 9 in public or regional libraries. Most frequently mentioned job assignments among the 2010 cohort were reference/information services, cataloguing and metadata, and circulation.

Some 80% of responding 2010 graduates found their first positions within three months of graduation, and 8 graduates who had changed positions by the time of the survey took longer than six months to find subsequent placements. As in recent years, they found the majority of their positions through electronic sources.

Most of the 2010 graduates were generally positive about their MLIS program experiences. Key areas of curricular knowledge and skills acquired in the MLIS program that helped graduates most in securing their positions were technology skills, subject specialization, and practicum experience. “Top of mind” reactions to their programs ranged from “means to an end,” adequate, satisfactory, positive, and interesting to supportive and conducive, challenging, fun, inspiring, fulfilling, excellent, and phenomenal.

An important employment indicator is graduates' satisfaction with their present situation. Nine of the 15 responding graduates in 2010 (60%) said they were seeking more satisfactory employment at the time of the survey, preferably full-time positions in academic libraries, with a median salary expectation of \$58,000 per year, although 1 graduate was willing to take contract work, even part time. Among the 2007 cohort (the last time this question was asked), only 37% responded yes, and earlier rates for 2006 to 2003 graduates were 50%, 57%, 35%, and 54%, respectively.

However one chooses to interpret the 2010 patterns, it is worth taking into consideration whether having more than half of a new professional cohort looking for better jobs after only a year in practice suggests a problem for the profession at large, as well as for individual employers.

Placement

Seventeen of the 18 reporting graduates in 2010 (94%) said they were employed in library and information services at some point since graduation. However, 13 of the 17 (77%) had changed positions by the time of the survey, suggesting a somewhat unstable job market. Among 2009 graduates, a similar proportion had also changed positions since graduation. One 2010 graduate had always worked outside the field but thought the MLIS program had helped them not only win a position but secure a better one.

By the time of the survey, 9 graduates in 2010 had worked in both permanent and temporary positions. Two of those reporting a permanent position also had held two temporary positions each, while 2 others with a permanent position had held three temporary positions. One graduate reported having had two permanent and two temporary positions.

Altogether, only 24% (4 of 17) of the 2010 graduates reported just one placement each, while 76% had two or more by the time of the survey, with 8 reporting two placements each, 2 reporting three, and 3 reporting four.

Fourteen of the 17 placements at the time of the survey were full time, 13 of which were permanent positions and 4 were contracts ranging in time from 8 to 16 months (median 11 months, 2.5 months longer than for 2009). Three graduates had part-time placements, both permanent and contract arrangements.

Current Placement Status	Number	Percentage
Full-time permanent	10	59%
Full-time temporary	4	23
Part-time status	3	18
TOTAL	17	100%

Salaries

To the extent the survey data may be compared over time, salaries of 2010 graduates have remained flat over those of 2009 and 2008 graduates. Median earnings were \$55,500 (mean \$53,450) for 10 graduates in 2010 holding full-time permanent positions, with salaries ranging from \$28,000 to \$72,000 per year.

The median salary for 4 comparable graduates in 2009 was \$45,591 (mean \$55,774), and it was \$55,574 (mean \$55,774) for 20 comparable graduates in 2008. Comparing 2010 to 2008 salaries, 2010 graduates earned a median annual salary of \$74 lower than the 2008 cohort.

Four graduates in 2010 with full-time contract positions reported a median monthly salary of \$3,713, ranging from \$3,000 to \$5,000 per month. Contracts were for 8 to 16 months. Part-time positions at the time of the survey were reported by 3 graduates in 2010, with hours ranging from 4 to 30 per week and wages from \$12 to \$50 per hour.

Employment Sector

Five of the 2010 graduates (28%) had placements in post-secondary libraries at the time of the survey. Three were in records management units, 2 each were in special libraries, school libraries, archives, and not-for-profit units, and 1 each were in a public library and in a research unit. Among 2009 graduates, 7 placements (58%) since graduation were in public libraries, 2 (17%) were in post-secondary institution libraries, 2 in government libraries, and 1 in archives.

All Placements since Graduation	Number	Percentage
Post-secondary libraries	5	28%
Records management units	3	17
Special libraries	2	11
School libraries	2	11
Archives	2	11
Not-for-profit unit	2	11
Public library	1	6
Research unit	1	6
TOTAL	18	101%

These two cohorts indicate quite different sectoral configurations than reported by 2008 graduates, with 10 placements (34%) in post-secondary institution libraries and 9 (31%) in public or regional libraries.

Graduates in 2010 reported a variety of job titles, with Research Librarian mentioned 3 times, 2 mentions each of Archivist (Records and Archives Analyst), and 1 mention each of Information Specialist, Records Management Clerk, Aboriginal Engagement Librarian, Business Analyst, School Librarian, Resource Coordinator, Metadata and Cataloguing Librarian, Reading Room and Communications Coordinator, Public Service Assistant, and Library Technician.

Job assignments, both primary and secondary, were described as mainly reference/information services (11 mentions), cataloguing and metadata (7), and circulation (6). Less frequently reported were collections (3), and 2 mentions each for all functions, archives, marketing/outreach/public relations, web manage/web content manager, and records management. Mentioned only once were acquisitions, administration/management, database management, government documents, interlibrary loans, teacher-librarian, and telecommunications.

Location

Half of the 2010 reporting graduates listed Edmonton as home, the same as for 2009. Other Alberta locations in 2010 were Calgary (1 graduate) and Lacombe (1). Altogether, 61% or 11 graduates stayed in Alberta, also generally echoing previous cohorts. Other work locations reported among 2010 graduates were 2 in Vancouver and 1 each in Ottawa, Toronto, Egypt, and England.

Half of the 2009 graduates listed Edmonton as home, generally echoing previous cohorts from 2008 back to 2003. Other Alberta locations in 2009 were Calgary (3 graduates) and Grande Prairie (1 graduate). Altogether, 79% or 11 graduates stayed in Alberta, also generally echoing previous cohorts. Other work locations reported by 2009 graduates were 1 each in Saskatoon, Toronto, and Victoria.

Job Search Time Frame

Some 80% of responding 2010 graduates (12 of 15) found their first positions within three months of graduation. Among those who changed positions by the time of the survey, 8 positions took longer than six months to find. Six responding graduates in 2009 found their first positions within three months of graduation. All 6 of the reporting 2009 graduates found their first positions within three months of graduation; among those who changed positions by the time of the survey, 2 positions took longer than six months to find.

Position Obtained	First Position		Current Position*	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Before entering program	4	27%	---	
Before graduation	2	13	---	
Within 3 months of graduation	6	40	---	
3 to 6 months after graduation	3	20	2	20%
More than 6 months after graduation	---		8	80
TOTAL	15	100%	10	100%

**if different from first*

Job Search Sources

Graduates in 2010 found 60% of their positions, whether first or current, through electronic sources, while word of mouth and a newspaper posting accounted for the others (30% and 10%, respectively).

Graduates in 2009 were similar, finding more than half of their positions (57%) through electronic sources, while word of mouth accounted for 1 in 3 sources. For the first time in three years, JEROME-L was not mentioned by 2010 graduates as a job search source.

Job Search Sources*	Number of Sources	Percentage
Listserve and job sites	6	60%
Partnership job board list	2	
Wowjobs website	1	
listserv	1	
UofA Careers website	1	
University job posting	1	
Word of mouth	3	30
Library colleagues	2	
SLIS classmates	1	
Newspaper posting	1	10
TOTAL	10	100%

* *first and current positions*

Library Work Experience

By graduation in 2010, 16 of the 18 responding cohort (89%) had gained work experience in libraries, archives, or other information-related positions. This pattern paralleled patterns of the previous decade, which ranged from 82% to 100%. Seven in 10 graduates in 2010 reported relevant experience both before and during their MLIS programs.

Library Work Experience*	Number	Percentage
Either before or during MLIS	3	17%
- before (13)		
- during (16)		
Both before and during MLIS	13	72
Neither	2	11
TOTAL	18	100%

* *excludes for-credit field placements and practicums*

MLIS Program Professional Career Preparation

A key area of curricular knowledge and skills acquired in the MLIS program that 2010 graduates thought helped them most in securing their positions, both first and current, was technology skills (5 mentions), followed by 4 mentions each of subject specialization and the practicum, 3 mentions of type of library environment, and 2 mentions of management, marketing, and communication skills. Also reported were self-directed study on metadata, prior expertise in music, and “a diverse background including library experience.”

Most of the 2010 graduates who responded to the survey were generally positive about their MLIS program experiences. One said, “There were strengths and weaknesses to my MLIS experience. Certain courses missed some practical application.” Another commented, “I have steadily recommended people to the program (two of who were accepted and graduated already) due to its flexibility to meet the varied interests of these individuals in the library/information field. For myself, I had a good job and have recently changed to a new, even better, job. I know my MLIS helped me win this position.”

When they were asked to describe their MLIS program experience “in a word,” top of mind reactions ranged from “means to an end,” adequate, satisfactory, positive, and interesting to supportive and conducive, challenging, fun, inspiring, fulfilling, excellent, and phenomenal.

Demographic Profile

Of the 18 survey respondents in 2010, 11 were women and 7 were men, 61% and 39%, respectively. This ratio is somewhat different from the previous class, which reported 79% women and 21% men. The average age at graduation for the class of 2010 was 31 years, also comparable to the range in ages of the previous three decades or so, 29 to 35 years old.

Graduates' most recent academic degrees generally paralleled the patterns of previous years: 12 BAs, 3 BScs, 1 BEd, and 2 MAs. Disciplinary majors were English (6 graduates), History (2), Classics (2), and one each in Anthropology, Canadian Studies, Comparative Literature, Elementary Education, Health Science, Nursing, Political Science, Psychology, Spanish Language and Literature, and one double major in Psychology and Mathematical Sciences.

Future Prospects

An important employment indicator is graduates' satisfaction with their present situation. Nine of the 15 responding graduates in 2010 (60%) said they were seeking more satisfactory employment at the time of the survey. All wanted full-time positions, but one was willing to take contract work, even part time, commenting, "Just hoping that more job opportunities come along soon, very dismal prospects currently." Among the 2007 cohort (the last time this question was asked), only 37% responded yes, and the rates for 2006 to 2003 graduates were 50%, 57%, 35%, and 54%, respectively.

However one chooses to interpret the 2010 patterns, it is worth bearing in mind whether having more than half of a new professional cohort looking for better jobs after only a year in practice suggests a problem for the profession at large, as well as for individual employers.

Sector preferences indicated by 8 graduates in 2010 looking for more satisfactory positions were academic libraries (5), public libraries (1), and records management (1). One said either academic or public and another said any library. Annual salary expectations ranged from \$30,000 to \$70,000, with a median of \$58,000. Among the 2007 cohort who said they were still looking, salary expectations had been in the range of \$50,000 to \$84,000, with a median of \$55,000.

Thanks to all who responded to the annual survey and trusted the School with personal data, particularly salary and wage information, for this aggregate analysis that preserves individual privacy.

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August 2012