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So, You Want to Be a Southeastern Librarian? Entry-Level Academic Library Job Trends in the Southeast

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So, You Want to Be a Southeastern Librarian?
Entry-Level Academic Library Job Trends in the Southeast

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Introduction

While it is no secret that looking for one's first job as a librarian can be difficult, especially in the current economic climate, the process can be even more challenging when one's search must take place within a particular geographic area or region. For a variety of reasons, including financial constraints and family obligations, many entry-level candidates are not in a position to move to any part of the country and start their new lives as professional librarians. The need to focus a job search on a specific region, however, necessarily limits the number of available jobs. Developing a strong understanding of the job environment is vital to competing successfully for a small number of positions. When preparing to enter a highly competitive market, job seekers will find it advantageous to know more about what types of jobs are likely to be available, how lucrative the jobs might be, how much experience might be needed, and other concerns about the job market.

Examining such concerns in relation to one specific region, this article provides an overview of recent trends in the entry-level job market for academic librarians in the Southeastern United States. Based on an analysis of job advertisements collected over a one-year period (January-December 2010), this overview should be relevant and useful to anyone interested in starting a career in academic librarianship in the Southeast or certain states within that region. Additionally, the information herein should also give current academic librarians in the Southeast a general sense of what skills and specialties are being prioritized in entry-level jobs throughout the region. Although *Library Journal*'s annual "Placements and Salaries Survey" incorporates some geographically focused data regarding jobs obtained by recent graduates of library and information science programs (e.g. Maatta, 2011), this article presents a more detailed examination of the specific types of positions currently being advertised by academic institutions in the Southeast. In addition, while there have been a number of formal research studies examining library job advertisements primarily at the national level (e.g. Beile & Adams, 2000; Reeves & Hahn, 2010; Sproles & Ratledge, 2004), this article is unique in its regional emphasis. As such, our intention is not only to offer helpful information to Southeastern librarians and soon-to-be-Southeastern-librarians but also to acknowledge the reality that not all job seekers engage in a national or international search for a position. Job candidates limited by region or state may need more information to plan their searches effectively; this article represents one example of how we might provide that

information through a close look at advertised positions.

Data Collection

Throughout 2010, entry-level advertisements were gathered from the American Library Association's *JobLIST* website, *LISjobs.com*, and several professional listservs, including ili-l (the American Library Association's listserv on information literacy instruction), libref-l (Kent State University's listserv on library reference issues), and various library school listservs. Only permanent, full-time positions were studied; thus, temporary, part-time, foreign, and community college ads were excluded. Employing the criteria developed by Sproles and Ratledge (2004), ads were determined to be entry-level if they met one of the following conditions: used the term "entry-level," did not mention required professional experience, or made no statements indicating requirements impossible for entry-level candidates to meet, such as administrative duties or "progressive" experience.

Of the 428 ads gathered, 129 (30.1%) were jobs identified as being located in the Southeast. States considered part of the Southeast for the purpose of this article were Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Although departmental responsibilities may overlap in certain positions, each entry-level job was categorized based on the department encompassing its *primary* area of responsibility: computer technology, public services, or technical services. Computer technology positions, including systems librarians, focus on the administration of computer networks and related technological applications within the library. Public services positions, including reference and instruction librarians, involve direct and significant interaction with library patrons. Technical services positions emphasize functions such as cataloging, creating metadata, managing acquisitions, or other responsibilities not directly related to public services. Additional data from the ads were coded into a spreadsheet and analyzed to extrapolate trends relating to experience, job duties, and other areas.

Job Location

Of the 129 entry-level jobs identified as having a Southeastern location, the majority (75 positions or 58.1%) were public services related. Of the remaining ads, 33 positions (25.5%) were identified as technical services, while 21 (16.2%) were computer technology positions. [Figure 1]. The good news for entry-level job seekers with a public services orientation is that their skills are clearly in demand. On the other hand, the competition for public services jobs may be more extreme because of their popularity (Maatta, 2011).

Figure 1

Categories of Entry-Level Jobs in the Southeast
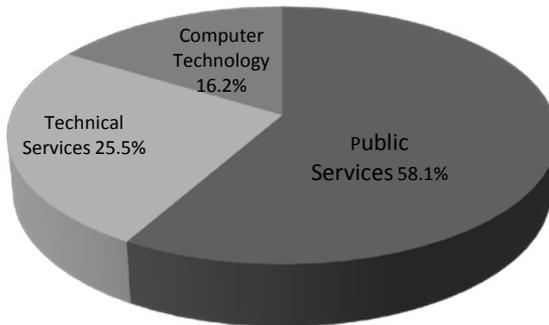
At the state level, North Carolina had the most entry-level ads with 23, whereas Arkansas and Louisiana were tied for the least with only two each [Figure 2]. Although Georgia posted the most public services positions (14), North Carolina listed the most technical services ads (9) as well as the most computer technology ads (5). Based on these 2010 figures, North Carolina seems to be relatively fertile ground for entry-level academic library jobs.

Figure 2

| STATE	TECHNICAL SERVICES	COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY	PUBLIC SERVICES
Alabama	3	2	7
Arkansas	0	0	2
Florida	4	3	10
Georgia	4	3	14
Kentucky	3	0	6
Louisiana	0	0	2
Mississippi	0	1	2
North Carolina	9	5	9
South Carolina	2	2	10
Tennessee	3	4	4
Virginia	3	1	8
West Virginia	2	0	1
TOTAL	**33**	**21**	**75**

Stated Duties

After ads were coded into one of the three categories, they were analyzed to determine the main responsibility within the category. Unsurprisingly, in the public services category [Figure 3], 38 positions (51.6%) listed the main responsibility as reference. Reference work includes duties such as providing service at a reference or information desk, monitoring an online chat service, and providing in-depth research assistance. Twenty-three public services ads (31.1%) described the main responsibility as information literacy or library instruction. Primary information literacy tasks include teaching classes at the library and developing online tutorials or other teaching materials. Three public services positions (4.1%) oversaw government documents, while the remaining 11 (14.9%) were scattered among branch administration, data management, interlibrary loan, special collections, circulation, distance learning, and learning commons management.

Information literacy is a large component of public services ads; in addition to being the main responsibility of 23 ads, all but one public services ad (98.6%) listed information literacy instruction as part of the stated job duties. Ten separate public services positions listed teaching a for-credit information literacy course as a requirement. Job seekers should be prepared to have information literacy as a component of their position. Promotion and outreach emerged in seven ads, with distance learning also specified in one position. These duties reflect the recent emphasis on marketing library services to various clientele (Mathews, 2009).
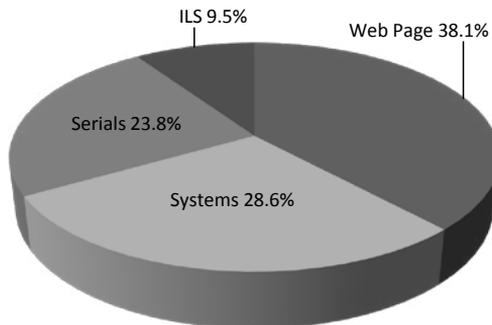
Figure 3

Main Responsibility of Public Services Positions

Other 14.9%

Government Documents 4.1%

Reference 51.6%

Information Literacy 31.1%
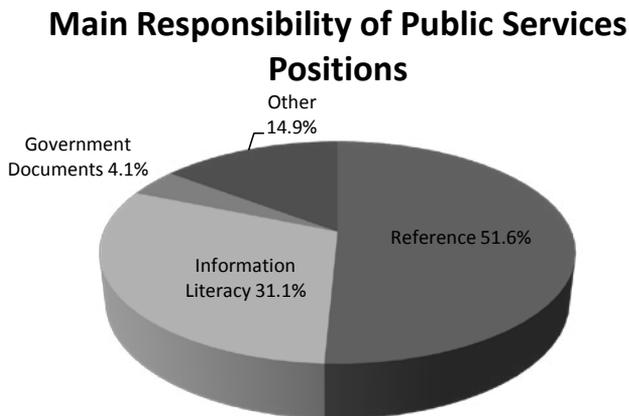
Main Responsibility- Public service Positions	Number of positions
Reference	38
Information Literacy	23
Government Documents	3
Branch Head	2
Data Management	2
Interlibrary Loan	2
Special Collections	2
Circulation	1
Distance Learning	1
Learning Commons	1

Computer technology positions demonstrated less diversity in responsibilities than public services positions [Figure 4]. Web page administration was the most common duty of jobs advertised in this area, with eight positions (38.1%) listing it as the primary duty. The second most common was actual systems administration, which appeared in six positions (28.6%). Management of electronic serials was third, with 5 positions (23.8%). Electronic oriented positions were included here; more traditional serials positions were categorized as technical services. Administration of an Integrated Library System (ILS) was listed in two positions (9.5%). Project management emerged as a big theme in many computer technology positions. Thirteen (61.9%) ads listed data management, project management, or electronic resources management as a duty highlighting a need for the ability to direct and oversee specific tasks and operations. The variety of primary duties indicates a diversification in the computer management needs of the library and a branching out of computer related services.

Figure 4

Main Responsibility of Computer Technology Positions

ILS 9.5% Web Page 38.1%
Serials 23.8%
Systems 28.6%

| Main Responsibility- Computer Technology Positions	Number of positions
Web Page	8
Systems	6
Serials	5
ILS	2

In technical services, standard cataloging positions accounted for only 10 positions (30.3%) [Figure 5]. Interestingly, it appears that the need for digital collections specialists is in greater demand now, with twelve positions (36.4%). As academic libraries will likely continue to expand their efforts to digitize content and unique collections, entry-level job seekers can expect that any skills in this area will be highly beneficial on the job market. Hiring institutions also sought serials librarians (4 positions or 12.1%), which can be listed as either technical services or computer technology positions. The remaining four positions were spread out among acquisitions, circulation, database management, and interlibrary loan.

A major trend discovered in job responsibilities for technical services was the focus on digital collections, indicating a move away from traditional book cataloging. Including those that listed digital collections as the main responsibility, 18 ads referred to working with either metadata or digital repositories. Eight ads listed working with data as a responsibility, either through data manipulation or database management.

Figure 5

Main Responsibility of Technical Services Positions

- Collection Development 9.0%
- Digital Collections 36.40
- Other 12.1%
- Serials 12.1%
- Cataloging 30.3%
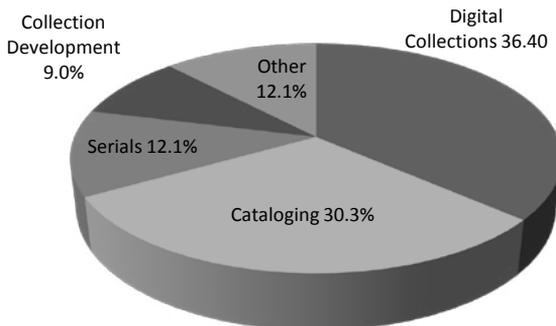
Main Responsibility- Technical Services Positions	Number of positions
Digital Collections	12
Cataloging	10
Serials	4
Collection Development	3
Acquisitions	1
Circulation	1
Database Management	1
Interlibrary Loan	1

Experience

While ads requiring professional experience were excluded from this study, overall, fully 90.9% of technical services ads (30) required some type of non-professional experience. In addition, 80.9% (17) of computer technology jobs asked for non-professional experience and roughly half (49.3% or 37 ads) of the public services positions required non-professional experience. [Figure 6].

Figure 6

Percentage of Ads Requiring Non-Professional Experience
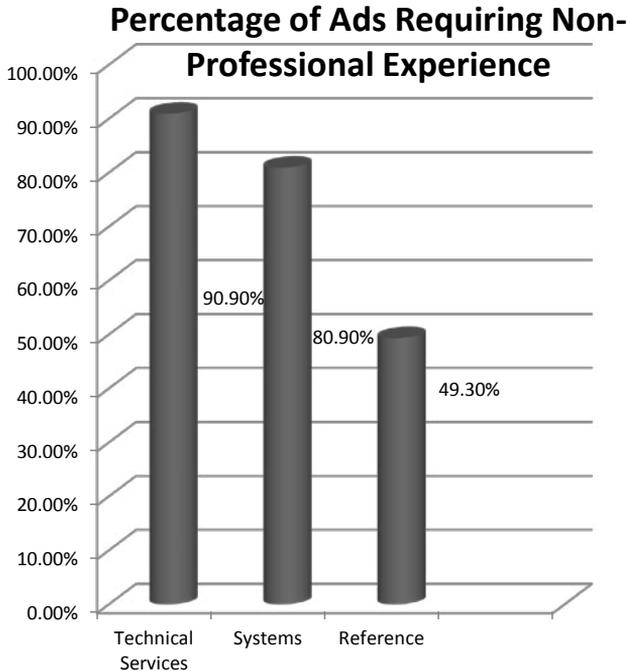
Information literacy experience was by far the most required skill of public services jobs [Figure 7], with 21 positions requiring experience and another 19 jobs preferring experience. Fifty-three percent of public services jobs either required or preferred experience with information literacy or library instruction. Thus, experience of any kind in instruction will almost certainly be valuable for entry-level job seekers interested in public services work.

Beyond information literacy experience, reference experience was required for 13 positions (17.3%). While the sample used for this article is not necessarily representative of the profession as a whole, the fact that more public services ads require information literacy experience than reference experience may suggest that instruction, rather than traditional reference work, is now the key responsibility associated with public services in academic libraries in the Southeast.

After reference, subject experience was the next most requested, appearing in eight (10.6%) of the ads. Six ads (8.0%) required public service experience (as a generality), and three (4.0%) asked for general library experience. 2.6% of the ads (2 each) asked for experience with web resources or government documents experience.

Figure 7

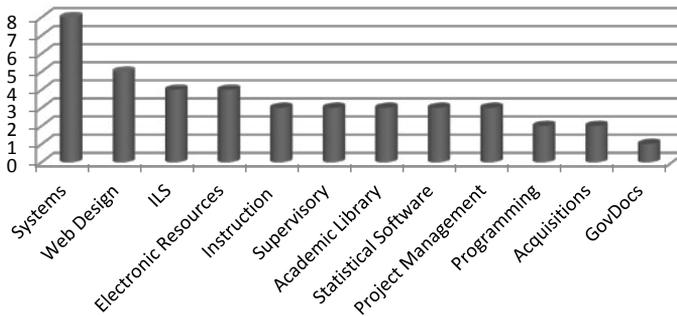## Experience Requirements for Public Services Positions
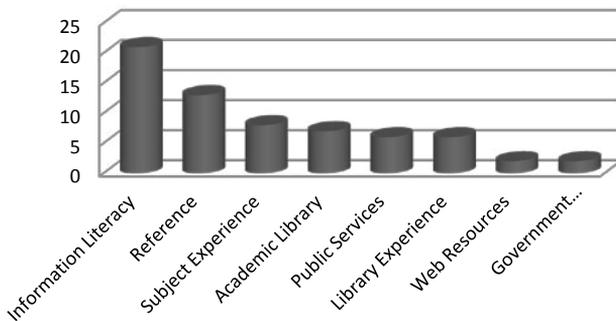
Computer technology ads also displayed a variety of experience requirements [Figure 8]. Systems experience was requested in eight ads (38.1%); web design was second, with five positions (23.8%). Experience with an ILS and electronic resources were required in four ads each (16%). Three ads listed several experience requirements (14.3%): instruction, general computer, supervisory, academic library, statistical software, and project management. Programming and acquisitions were required in only two positions, while government documents experience was required in just one.

Figure 8

## Experience Requirements for Computer Technology Positions

Technical services ads required a broad array of experience [Figure 9], much more so than the other two categories. Twenty-five separate experience requirements were listed throughout the ads. The most popular experience requirement was cataloging, listed in fifteen positions (45.5%). Next was experience with digital projects, with ten positions (30.3%). Academic library and supervisory experience were each listed eight times (24.2%). Experience with an ILS was required in six ads (18.1%), followed by four (12.1%) ads requiring experience with metadata. Public services and special collections experience was listed in three ads (9.1%), while collection development, training, grant writing, and data management were each listed twice. Other assorted experiences that were only listed once include general library experience, acquisitions, circulation, outsourcing, assessment, diversity, institutional repository, general technical services, content management systems, outreach, project management, serials, and budgeting. The diverse nature of experience requirements indicates that job seekers in the Southeast who are interested in technical services will need to be quite knowledgeable about specific technologies and trends, and will need practical experience in the field.

Figure 9

Experience Requirements for Technical Services Positions
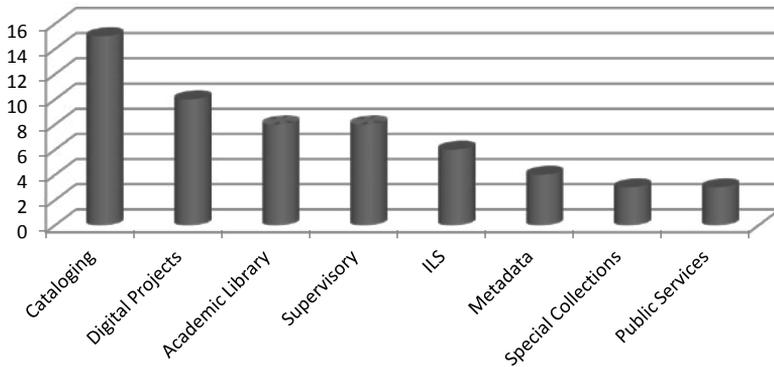

Salaries

Although average salaries were difficult to determine because the majority of ads did not list a salary, we are including the limited information we were able to collect on salaries under the assumption that entry-level job seekers are interested in how lucrative their future positions might be [Figure 10]. Of the 41 ads listing a minimum staring salary (31.8% of total ads in the Southeast), the average for all positions was $43,225. Computer technology positions paid the most with an average starting salary of $46,455, while technical services averaged $42,722 and public services averaged $41,749. Since public services positions seem to be the most readily available for new academic librarians, perhaps it follows that they would be the least lucrative. Hiring institutions appear to be willing to pay (slightly) more for technology and technical services skills that they view as more specialized.

Figure 10

Average Salary
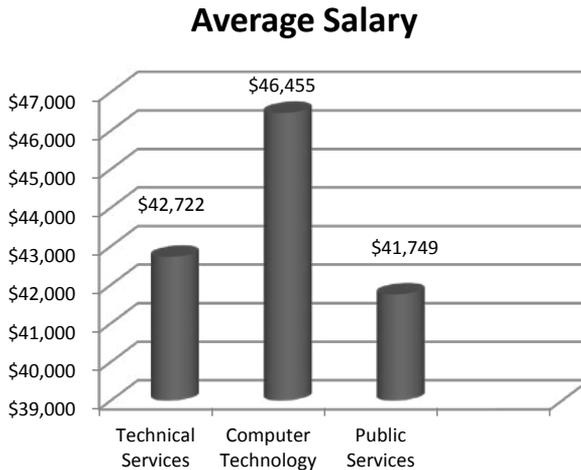
Tenure Status

In regard to tenure status, the majority of ads collected were not for tenure-track positions. Only ten (30.3%) of the 33 technical services positions were defined as tenure-track, as were 23 (30.6%) of the public services positions. Computer technology ads represented the highest percentage of tenure-track jobs with nine positions (42.8%). However, regardless of tenure status, requiring research and professional activity, such as publishing and participating in professional activities, was pervasive. Twenty-two technical services ads (66.7%), 15 computer technology ads (71.4%), and 36 public services ads (48.0%) specifically addressed the expectation of evidence of activity within the profession. Most graduates should strive to be professionally active upon hiring.

Conclusion

The job-related information provided in this article is limited in several ways. Perhaps most importantly, the data is not comprehensive because not all institutions advertise positions on *JobLIST* or *LISjobs.com*. Although we included some positions advertised on listservs and not on the two websites, there are so many potential venues for job advertisements in the online world that it would be impossible to collect every advertised position. It is also important to point out that we only examined job advertisements. While these advertisements offer useful insights into the expectations of hiring institutions, they do not necessarily reflect the exact nature of jobs in the "real world." Indeed, advertisements tend to represent the ideal nature of a position. Institutions are not always able to recruit ideal candidates, and positions may evolve based on the needs of the institutions and/or the skills of successful candidates. That said, job seekers (entry-level or otherwise) are in the difficult position of needing to match, as closely as possible, the institutional ideal. Examining job advertisements in detail is one of the best methods of understanding that ideal.

Despite the aforementioned limitations of the data, we did collect a substantial number of advertisements and, as a result, we can draw some general conclusions about key trends in the Southeastern academic library job market. First, regardless of the specialty area entered, most academic librarians are now expected to engage in some form of instruction. Across all specialties (public services, technical services, computer technology), job duties related to information literacy was pervasive, with duties related to information literacy and/or library instruction appearing in 73.6% of all ads. While it follows that entry-level candidates interested in public services would need to gain instructional experience and knowledge of information literacy to prepare for the job market, it might be less obvious to candidates interested in technical services or computer technology that they too would benefit from prior experience with instruction. This is not to say that information literacy should be the highest priority for such candidates, but the ads we have collected suggest that information literacy will continue to play a significant role in all areas of academic librarianship.

Second, entry-level candidates interested in technical services will likely need substantial experience and knowledge in order to meet the minimum requirements for most current entry-level positions in this area. As previously noted, the technical services ads collected for this article required a diverse range of specific experience requirements: cataloging, ILS management, metadata creation, etc. Although these ads, like all ads discussed here, did not require candidates to have actual professional experience, most entry-level technical services job seekers will need paraprofessional experience of some kind (or perhaps an internship) to obtain their first professional positions. It is unlikely that entry-level candidates would be able to gain the specialized experience required by hiring institutions through a graduate program alone.

Lastly, several emerging trends not traditionally associated with entry-level librarianship were identified in this analysis. These trends include assessment (19 ads), implementation and planning (12 ads), data management/curation (15 ads), and project management (16 ads). Scholarly communication, as well as promotion and outreach, were mentioned in all three specialty areas, highlighting new directions in librarianship. Entry-level academic librarians in the Southeast can expect to develop a variety of new skills as library collections and services evolve with the times.

This article has attempted to provide entry-level academic job seekers in the Southeast with relevant information about trends and conditions in the field. Hopefully, this will help library school students who plan to work in this region to focus their training and experience and successfully secure a position upon graduation.

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