

U of A SLIS Employment Survey of 2008 Graduates

During the spring 2010, the School conducted its 21st annual employment survey of graduates of the Master of Library and Information Studies program at the University of Alberta. The response rate was 77% (33 out of 43 MLIS graduates), somewhat lower than the 91% response rate for 2007 graduates. The 2008 survey was conducted just under two years after the spring class convocated, with a small number of fall 2008 graduates also included; this was some nine months later than in previous years.

Summary

Thirty-one of the 33 graduates in 2008 (94%) who responded to the annual survey said they had paid work in library and information studies at one time or another since graduation, echoing high placement rates during the previous two decades, on the order of 75% to 100%. However, 2 in 3 graduates in 2008 had changed positions by the time of the survey.

Altogether, only 9 or 31% of the 29 graduates reporting in 2008 had just one placement since graduation, while 10 had two placements, 9 had three, and 1 had seven.

More than 80% of reporting graduates in 2008 (24 out of 29) found their first position within three months of graduation, up from the previous year at 73% but similar to the 2006 cohort at 85%; in 2005 it was 63%. Graduates in 2008 found more than 6 in 10 of their positions through electronic sources, while word of mouth accounted for 22%; these patterns were generally similar to those of the previous five cohorts.

The median salary reported by 20 graduates in 2008 with full-time permanent positions was \$55,574, ranging \$40,000 to \$75,000. To the extent the survey data may be compared over time, these figures indicate a median increase of \$5,874 or 11.8% over earnings by the 2007 cohort, which is explained at least in part by the survey timing of nine months later.

Post-secondary institution libraries and public and regional libraries each accounted for about 1 in 3 positions secured by 2008 graduates. By far the most frequently mentioned job assignments were reference/information services (6 mentions) and administration/management. Edmonton remained the residence of choice for about the same percentage of responding graduates in 2008 as for the 2007 class, 57% compared to 61%.

Most of the 2008 graduates were generally positive about their MLIS program experiences. The key area of curricular knowledge and skills that they thought helped them most in securing their positions was subject specialization, followed by technology and information management skills, the practicum field experience, type of library environment, and management, marketing, and communication skills. Several graduates also referred to general or overall MLIS curricular preparation.

Placement

All but two of 33 reporting graduates in 2008 (94%) said they were employed in library and information services at some point since graduation, although 2 in 3 (21 out of 32) had changed positions in the interim. One of the two unemployed in the field was still seeking a relevant position. This is similar to the previous cohort, when all but one of 31 graduates (97%) reported employment or self-employment in library and information services after completing their MLIS degree. In the five years before, placements rates were 100%, 96%, 85%, 93%, and 100%, respectively, between 2006 and 2002.

An important employment indicator is the nature of positions held. At the time of the survey of the 2008 cohort, all of the 31 employed graduates were working full time, in either permanent or temporary positions. Among 2007 graduates, 83% reported full-time status.

However, 4 graduates in 2008 had held two full-time permanent positions by the time of the survey, while 17 others reported holding only one such position. Among those with full-time temporary or contract employment at some point since graduation, 10 reported holding only one position, 19 reported two positions, 1 had three, and 1 had seven.

Altogether, only 9 or 31% of the 29 graduates reporting in 2008 had just one placement since graduation, while 10 had two placements, 9 had three, and 1 had seven.

Three-quarters of the full-time positions held by 2008 graduates were permanent (23 out of 31). This ratio is somewhat similar to the overall patterns identified in the previous eight years, which ranged from 50% in 2007, 53% in 2006, and 64% in 2004, to as high as 71% and 76% in 2001 and 2000, respectively.

Of the 8 graduates in 2008 with full-time temporary positions at the time of the survey, contracts ranged from 8 to 36 months, with a median of 12 months, the same median time as reported in 2007 and 2006. One of the 2008 graduates in a contract position pointed out that their job was for two years though technically temporary and they were optimistic it would become permanent.

Current Placement Status	Number	Percentage
Full-time permanent	23	74%
Full-time temporary	8	26
TOTAL	31	100%

Salaries

Annual salaries reported by 20 graduates with full-time permanent positions in the 2008 cohort ranged from \$40,000 to \$75,000, with a median of \$55,574 (mean \$55,774). To the extent the survey data may be compared over time, these figures indicate a median increase of \$5,874 or 11.8% over 2007 (mean increase of 8.5%), substantially higher than the 2007 cohort earned but at least partially explained by the survey timing of nine months later. The median increase in salaries for full-time permanent positions held by 2007 graduates was \$1,700 or 3.5% over the previous cohort (mean increase of 6.6%). Earlier cohorts in 2006 and 2005 experienced on the order of 1% or 1.1% increases.

Median earnings reported by 8 graduates in 2008 holding full-time contract positions at the time of the survey were \$3,625 per month (mean \$3,919), ranging from \$2,700 to \$6,500 monthly. These figures represent a median monthly decrease over 2007 of \$742 or 17% (mean decrease of 7.4%). In contrast, the 2007 cohort showed a median earnings increase over the 2006 cohort of \$667 per month, and the 2006 cohort reported a median increase of \$400 per month over the 2005 cohort.

Employment Sector

Since graduation, 1 in 3 graduates in 2008 worked in post-secondary institution libraries and about the same proportion in public or regional libraries. Previous cohorts for 2007 and 2006 echoed broadly these sectoral representations, but only 15% of 2005 graduates were employed in post-secondary library positions. Four of the 2008 graduates worked in government libraries and 2 each in records management, government units, and business communications.

All Placements since Graduation	Number	Percentage
Post-secondary libraries	10	34%
Public (8) & regional (1) libraries	9	31
Special (Government) libraries	4	14
Records management units	2	7
Government units	2	7
Business communications	2	7
TOTAL	29	100%

Most frequently reported titles and positions held by the 2008 graduates were 6 Librarians (including 1 Librarian (Assistant Professor) and 1 Information Specialist), 6 Reference Librarians (variously, Client Services Librarian, Cybrarian (Teen Services Librarian), and Business Services Librarian), 3 Community or Community Outreach Librarians, 3 Systems Librarian (including Associate Systems Librarian and Manager of Library Operations and Services), Cataloguer, Head Librarian, and Learning Resource Coordinator. Other titles were Project Manager, Records and Information Management Analyst Intern, Research Analyst, Research Specialist, Senior Business Analyst, and 2 Technical Writers.

By far the most frequently mentioned primary job assignment was reference/information services (6 mentions), followed by 5 mentions for administration/management, and 2 mentions of information literacy instruction. Mentioned once each were all functions, acquisitions, cataloguing, database management, systems/network manager, research, community-led library work, and e-learning initiatives; 3 other graduates described their work respectively as “functions stretch outside library functions at times including consulting on proposals, consulting on college website, etc.”; “developing and administering system wide programs for teens, working on system committees to plan broad initiatives for the library system, and maintaining teen website, blog, twitter, etc.,” and “policy development, standards and best practices, creation of tools and templates, process creation and implementation.”

Secondary job assignments mentioned 5 times were reference/information services, and mentioned 3 times were all functions and collections. Mentioned twice were database management, information literacy instruction, and marketing outreach/public relations, and once each were acquisitions, administration/management, government documents, and youth and information services.

Location

Edmonton remained the residence of choice for about the same percentage of 2008 responding graduates as for the 2007 class, 57% compared to 61%. While the ratio has fluctuated over the years, it was 42% in 2005, 55% in 2004, and 60% in 2003; the 2006 graduates were something of an anomaly in this regard, with only 27% staying in the City. Other job locations in 2008 were Calgary (5 graduates) and Whitecourt (1 graduate). Altogether, Alberta provided 77% of current locations (23 graduates), similar to 2005 (71%) and 2004 (75%), but contrasting somewhat with 2007 (84%) and 2006 (50%). Other work locations reported by 2008 graduates were 3 in Vancouver and 1 each in Regina, Winnipeg, Kamloops and the U.S.

Among the previous three cohorts in 2007, 2006, and 2005, 1 graduate each year also went to the U.S., but there were none among the 2004 and 2003 classes; this contrasted sharply with the earlier years 1999–2002 when on average 18% of respondents found work there.

Job Search Time Frame

By far the majority of the 29 reporting graduates in 2008 (24 or 83%) found their first position within three months of graduation; 2 graduates (7%) took longer than six months. Among the 2007 cohort, 73% found their first position within three months of graduation, and another 19% took longer than six months. Graduates in the 2006 cohort were similar to 2008: 85% within three months of graduation and another 14% took more than six months. In 2005, only 63% found their first position within three months of graduation, while 14% took more than six months.

Of the 17 graduates in 2008 who changed positions after graduation, 15 (88%) took more than six months after graduation to obtain their current employment. The comparable figure for 2007 graduates was 70%.

Position Obtained	First Position		Current Position*	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Before entering program	4	14%	---	
Before graduation	7	24	---	
Within 3 months of graduation	13	45	2	12%
3 to 6 months after graduation	3	10	---	
More than 6 months after graduation	2	7	15	88
TOTAL	29	100%	17	100%

**if different from first*

Job Search Sources

Graduates in 2008 found 63% of their positions, whether first or currently held, through electronic sources. Word of mouth accounted for 22% of all sources. Among 2007 graduates, the figures were 56% and 44%, respectively, somewhat similar to the 2006 and 2005 cohorts.

Additional sources reported by 2008 graduates were two mentions each of personnel firms and internal promotions. One graduate mentioned unsolicited resume submission.

Job Search Sources*	Number of Sources	Percentage
Listservs and job sites	20	63%
JEROME-L	8	
listserv	2	
FLA job line	1	
UofA libraries website	1	
UofA website	1	
Alberta government job site	1	
MLA website	1	
EPL website	1	
Manitoba government website	1	
library website	1	
government job search engine	1	
organization job site	1	
Word of mouth	7	22
SLIS faculty	2	
SLIS classmates	2	
library colleagues	2	
General	1	
Personnel firm	2	6
Internal promotion	2	6
Submitted resume	1	3
TOTAL	32	100%

** first and current positions*

Library Work Experience

By the time students graduated in 2008, 93% reported work experience either before or during their MLIS program in libraries, archives, or other information-related positions, very similar to cohorts in the previous eight years 2007–2000 that ranged from 82% to 97%. Just over half of the 2008 graduates worked both before and during their MLIS program, similar to 2007, while among the 2006 cohort it was 59% and 42% in 2005.

Library Work Experience*	Number	Percentage
Either before or during MLIS	12	40%
- before (18)		
- during (26)		
Both before and during MLIS	16	53
Neither	2	7
TOTAL	30	100%

** excludes for-credit field placements and practicums*

Also following the pattern of previous cohorts, a very high proportion of 2008 graduates (87%) gained relevant work experience during their MLIS program or in the summer(s) before they graduated. Only 2 with prior experience did not also work during their studies. Figures for the five preceding cohorts were: 87% in 2007, 91% in 2006, 96% in 2005, 82% in 2004, and 89% in 2003.

MLIS Program Professional Career Preparation

The key area of curricular knowledge and skills acquired in the MLIS program that 2008 graduates thought helped them most in securing their positions, both first and currently held, was subject specialization (19 mentions), followed by 10 mentions each of technology and information management skills and the practicum field experience.

Graduates also mentioned type of library environment (9 times) and management, marketing, and communication skills (5 times). Several graduates referred to general preparation: “a combination of getting a broad overview of useful subjects, having the guts to be a part of the first knowledge management class, taking the practicum course, and doing an independent study – the topic doesn't relate to my job, but it made me look good”; “a general understanding of tenets of profession, such as intellectual freedom, collection development, etc.”; “nothing specifically, the MLIS was what really mattered”; and “I do not currently work in library and information services; my skills in researching / interest in government policy were what enabled me to get my current position.” Another cited the directed study.

Most 2008 graduates were generally positive about their MLIS program experiences. One said, “Some very excellent courses, instructors and learning opportunities, but too much content that felt unnecessary and not useful.” Another commented there were holes in the curriculum.

Top of mind comments were, variously, the following “in a word” summaries: worthwhile, flexible, positive, good, practical, useful, diverse, purposeful (10 mentions); average, okay, not what was expected (3 mentions); and, empowering, excellent, fantastic, and wonderful (8 mentions).

Demographic Profile

Of the 30 survey respondents among the 2008 class, 25 were women and 5 were men, 83% and 17% respectively. This was very similar to the 2007 cohort. The average age at graduation for the class of 2008 was 32 years, which was within the age range of the previous three decades or so of 29 to 35 years old.

Academic degree patterns were generally similar to previous years: 21 had the BA, 3 the BSc, 1 the BFA, and 5 the MA. Other degrees represented the year before were the Bed, the BScE, the LLB, and the MSc. Also similar to previous cohorts, many disciplines were reported by the 2008 graduates: 8 in English, 5 in History including 1 in History and Hispanic Studies, 4 in Sociology, 3 in Anthropology, and one each in Comparative Literature, Environmental Biology, French, Humanities, Science, Marine Biology, Multidisciplinary Studies with a focus on Drama, Philosophy, Psychology, Religious Studies, and Urban Studies. Other disciplines reported by previous cohorts included Classics and French, Germanic Studies, Health Sciences, Human Geography, Linguistics, Modern Languages, Music, Physiology, Political Science, and Theatre Studies.

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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