

U of A SLIS Employment Survey of 2011 Graduates

During July and August 2012, the School conducted its 24th annual employment survey of graduates of the Master of Library and Information Studies program at the University of Alberta. The response rate was 48% (11 of 23 MLIS graduates), a little higher than for the previous two cohorts (40% for 2010 and 42% for 2009 graduates), but considerably lower than in earlier years with rates of 77% for 2008 and 91% for 2007. Some caution should therefore be exercised in generalizing from the survey results, all the more so because statistical patterns reflect only the numbers of respondents who answered particular questions. The 2011 survey was conducted approximately one year after the spring class convocated, with a small number of fall 2011 graduates also included.

Summary

Eight of the 11 reporting graduates in 2011 (73%) said they were employed in library and information services at some point since graduation, a lower rate than the 90% experienced by most of the cohorts in the previous decade. Two of the 2011 graduates were still seeking work in the field at the time of the survey. These patterns suggest a somewhat unstable labour market continued from 2010 to characterize job prospects for new graduates in 2011. Also supporting this view is that more than half of the 2011 reporting graduates had changed positions by the time of the survey, and continued to seek more satisfactory employment.

Salary data for the 2011 cohort are insufficient for comparative purposes, with only 1 of 2 graduates holding a full-time permanent position reporting their annual salary. The 2010 cohort with similar full-time permanent employment had median annual earnings of \$55,500. Five graduates in 2011 with full-time contract positions had a median monthly salary of \$3,940, amounting to less than 1% higher than comparable graduates in 2010 had earned. Three-quarters of the 2011 reporting graduates listed Edmonton as home, in contrast to most of the previous decade with only half of each cohort staying there.

Post-secondary institution libraries accounted since graduation for 57% of placements among 2011 graduates, while one each worked in a public library, a government library, and a government ministry. The most frequently mentioned job assignment for the 2011 cohort was reference/information services. In contrast, among 2010 graduates, 28% had post-secondary library placements, while among 2009 graduates, 58% were in public libraries. These three cohorts, 2011, 2010, and 2009, represent quite different sectoral configurations than was found for 2008 graduates, with 34% of placements in post-secondary institution libraries and 31% in public or regional libraries.

Some 71% of responding 2011 graduates found their first position within three months of graduation, and among those who changed jobs by the time of the survey, 1 position was secured in less than three months after graduation, while 3 took more than six months to find. Responding graduates in 2011 found their positions through electronic sources.

Most of the 2011 graduates were generally positive about their MLIS program experience, with type of library environment, subject specialization, and technology skills identified as the key areas of MLIS curricular knowledge and skills that helped them the most in securing their positions.

However, an important corroborating metric of labour market conditions is graduates' satisfaction with their present situation. Three-quarters of reporting graduates in 2011 said they were seeking more satisfactory, full-time employment at the time of the survey, in either academic libraries or archives and records management, with a median salary expectation of \$58,750 per annum. One graduate was willing to work in any sector, and another was willing to take contract work. Among the 2010 cohort, 60% had been seeking more satisfactory full-time employment at the time of the survey, while among the 2007 cohort only 37% were in the same situation. Rates for the earlier cohorts 2006 to 2003 were 50%, 57%, 35%, and 54%, respectively.

Placement

Eight of the 11 reporting graduates in 2011 (73%) said they were employed in library and information services at some point since graduation. This is a lower rate than the more than 90% experienced by most of the cohorts in the previous decade. Two of the 2011 graduates were still seeking work in the field at the time

of the survey, while 1 graduate was employed in another field. These patterns suggest that a somewhat unstable labour market continued to characterize job prospects for new graduates in 2011.

Also supporting this view is that more than half of the 2011 reporting graduates (4 of 7 or 57%) had changed positions by the time of the survey. Among the 2010 cohort, the figure was 77% and for each of the 2009 and 2008 cohorts it was 66%.

Altogether, 63% of the 2011 graduates reported just one placement each, permanent or temporary, while 37% had two or more placements by the time of the survey, with 2 graduates reporting two each and 1 reporting three. Among the 2010 cohort, 24% reported just one permanent or temporary placement each by the time of the survey, while 76% had two or more, with 8 reporting two placements each, 2 reporting three, and 3 reporting four.

By the time of the survey of 2011 graduates, only 2 or 25% had permanent placements, and 6 or 75% reported temporary positions. All eight positions were full time, but five were contracts ranging from 6 to 16 months (median 12 months), similar to the 2010 cohort.

Current Placement Status	Number*	Percentage
Full-time permanent	2	25%
Full-time temporary	6	75
Part-time status	---	
TOTAL	8	100%

** 2 graduates were still seeking work in the field and 1 was employed outside the field*

Salaries

Salary data for the 2011 cohort are insufficient for comparative purposes, with only 1 of 2 graduates holding full-time permanent positions reporting their annual salary, \$65,000. Ten graduates in 2010 with similar full-time permanent employment reported median annual earnings of \$55,500 (mean \$53,450). Median annual salaries for comparable positions reported by 4 graduates in 2009 were \$45,591 (mean \$55,774).

Five graduates in 2011 with full-time contract positions at some point since graduation reported a median monthly salary of \$3,940 (mean \$3,415), ranging from \$1,700 to \$4,333 per month. Contracts reported by 5 graduates in 2011 were for 6 to 16 months, similar to the 2010 cohort.

The 2011 median rate was less than 1% higher (\$227) than that reported by 4 graduates in 2010 with similar positions, whose median monthly earnings were \$3,713. Median earnings reported by 4 graduates in 2009 with similar positions were \$3,400 per month, while they were \$3,625 per month among 8 comparable graduates in 2008.

Employment Sector

Four of the reporting 2011 graduates (57%) had placements since graduation in post-secondary libraries, while one each worked in a public library, a government library, and a government ministry.

Among 2010 graduates, 28% had placements in post-secondary libraries, 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. Among 2009 graduates, 58% were in public libraries, 2 each were in post-secondary institution libraries and government libraries, and 1 was in archives.

These three cohorts, 2011/2010/2009, indicate quite different sectoral configurations than reported by 2008 graduates, with 34% of placements in post-secondary institution libraries and 31% in public or regional libraries.

Graduates in 2011 reported a variety of job titles: Librarian I, Public Services Librarian, Research Librarian, Law Librarian, 21st Century Library Spaces Librarian, Policy Analyst, and Policy Analyst (Information Privacy).

All Placements since Graduation	Number*	Percentage
Post-secondary libraries	4	57%
Public library	1	14
Special library	1	14
Government ministry	1	14
TOTAL	7	99%

** not all respondents answered this question*

Job assignments, both primary and secondary, were described as reference/information services (4 mentions), with 1 mention each for all functions, government documents, information literacy instruction, policy writing and research, and research.

Location

Three-quarters of the 2011 reporting graduates listed Edmonton as home, in contrast to most of the previous decade of graduates when approximately half of each cohort stayed there (57% of the 2008 cohort, 61% in 2007, 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.)

With 1 graduate in Wetaskwin, Alberta remained home to 82% of respondents. This was higher than for the 2010 cohort (61%) but similar to 2009 (79%).

Job Search Time Frame

Some 71% of responding 2011 graduates (5 of 7) found their first position within three months of graduation. Among those who changed jobs by the time of the survey, 1 position was secured in less than three months after graduation, while 3 took more than six months to find. Some 80% of responding graduates in 2010 found their first position within three months of graduation. All 6 of the reporting 2009 graduates found their first positions within three months of graduation.

Position Obtained	First Position		Current Position*	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Before entering program	1	14%	---	
Before graduation	1	14	---	
Within 3 months of graduation	3	43	1	25%
3 to 6 months after graduation	1	14	---	
More than 6 months after graduation	1	14	3	75
TOTAL	7	99%	4	100%

**if different from first – not all respondents answered questions about search time*

Job Search Sources

All (4 of 4) graduates in 2011 reporting how they found their positions, whether first or current, said electronic sources. This is in contrast to 2010 graduates, 60% of whom found their positions 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.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that these very low numbers (4 responses in 2011) may be even less reliable than a survey with an overall response rate of 48%.

Job Search Sources*	Number of Sources	Percentage
Listserve and job sites	4	100%
JEROME-L	1	
library website	1	
listserv	1	
Government job page	1	
TOTAL	4	100%

* *first and current positions – not all respondents answered questions about sources*

Library Work Experience

By graduation in 2011, 10 of the 11 responding cohort (91%) 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%. Six graduates (55%) in 2011 reported relevant experience both before and during their MLIS programs, lower than the 2010 cohort at 72% but similar to the 2009 cohort at 57%.

Library Work Experience*	Number	Percentage
Either before or during MLIS	4	36%
- before (6)		
- during (10)		
Both before and during MLIS	6	55
Neither	1	9
TOTAL	11	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 2011 graduates thought helped them most in securing their positions, both first and current at the time of the survey, was type of library environment (4 mentions), followed by 3 mentions each of subject specialization and technology skills. Also reported once each were research methods, “research experience,” and management, marketing, and communication skills.

Most of the 2011 graduates who responded to the survey were generally positive about their MLIS program experiences. One noted that the MLIS provided some of the basic career skills, but that ongoing learning was also required, and another mentioned that the program underscored how important soft skills and networking were to get ahead. One said that the program had led to an unanticipated type of work as a government analyst.

Four graduates commented that employment projections given at the School had been, in the words of one, “a bit too optimistic,” another that they were underemployed, and another said they felt “very prepared to work but found it very difficult to secure employment.” Another graduate commented that the claim there would be plentiful jobs in the future was a most disheartening myth “being perpetuated by professionals and schools everywhere.”

When 2011 graduates were asked to describe their MLIS program experience “in a word,” their top of mind reactions ranged from okay, interesting, and stressful to challenging, eye-opening, and “educational!”

Demographic Profile

Of the 11 survey respondents in 2011, 9 were women and 2 were men, 82% and 18%, respectively. This ratio is similar to the previous decade with the exception of the 2010 cohort consisting of 61% women and 39% men. The average age at graduation for the class of 2011 was 30 years, very similar to the age range over the previous three decades, 29 to 35 years old.

Graduates' most recent academic degrees were: 7 BAs, 1 BEd, 1 MA, 1 LLB, and 1 PhD. Disciplinary majors were History (3 graduates), English (1), and one each in Art History, French Literature, Language, Psychology, and Science; one graduate had a double major in English and History, and another did not have a major.

Future Prospects

An important indicator or metric of labour market conditions is graduates' satisfaction with their present situation. Five of the 7 reporting graduates (71%) in 2011 were seeking more satisfactory employment at the time of the survey. All 5 wanted full-time positions, but one was willing to take contract work if it was full time and at least 12 months in duration, commenting that the claim there would be plentiful jobs in the future was a most disheartening myth "being perpetuated by professionals and schools everywhere." Another said they were "currently underemployed in the library field."

Among 2010 graduates, 60% had been seeking more satisfactory full-time employment at the time of the survey. Among the 2007 cohort (this question was omitted in 2008 and 2009), only 37% were in the same situation, while the rates for the earlier cohorts 2006 to 2003 were 50%, 57%, 35%, and 54%, respectively.

Sector preferences by 2011 graduates looking for more satisfactory positions were academic libraries (2), archives and records management (1), and any type of library (1). Annual salary expectations ranged from \$55,000 to \$65,000, with a median of \$58,750. Among the 2010 cohort still looking, median annual salary expectations had been \$58,000 and among the 2007 cohort it was \$55,000.

As the earlier 2010 employment survey report also suggested, however one might choose to interpret the most recent 2011 and 2010 patterns, it is worth considering 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.

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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