

Librarian Salaries: Have they kept pace with inflation?

The American Library Association has collected information about salaries of professional staff in public and academic libraries since 1982. Between 1999 and 2004, the average salary for librarians increased each year from a low of 2.3% to a high of 4.7%. The net average increase was approximately 18%, or \$7,979. This is lower than the increase for comparable occupations reported each year by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in the *Monthly Labor Review*. These data, in conjunction with U.S. Census population data and fiscal reporting to the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), present an interesting picture of how salary expenditures have been suppressed to meet the growth in expenditures for materials and services.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 present salary data from three sources – the *ALA Survey of Librarian Salaries*, the Bureau of Labor Statistics wage estimates, and the *Public Library Data Service Statistical Report*. Figure 1 presents a summary of mean salary changes reported in the ALA Librarian salary surveys 1982-2004. It is important to note that data comparison issues existed early in the survey due to refining position titles and descriptions, and as a result of low response rates (1984-1986). For instance, the mean of all salaries for 1984 would have been \$23,981 if positions not reported in 1982 had been excluded. This is an increase of \$719. The 1992 data were skewed due to unusually high salaries reported for Children’s librarian positions. Removing Children’s Librarians from the distribution in the *1992 Librarian Salary Survey* brought the net salary change for all positions to 3.6%, a more realistic estimate and comparable to the national average. Further, mean starting salaries for positions were reported for 1982, 1984 and 1986, while mean salaries were reported 1988-2004.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data are for the first quarter of each year unless otherwise noted. The first quarter change for 1984 was calculated by determining the average for three categories of workers. The 2005 updated BLS web tool supports analysis by a range of worker classifications, including “white-collar occupations,” and is available at <http://data.bls.gov/PDQ/outside.jsp?survey=ec>.

Figure 1: ALA Salary Survey 1982-2004: Mean Salaries Change Compared with U.S. Workers

<i>Year</i>	<i>Mean Salary (all positions)</i>	<i>Net Change (all positions)</i>
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1991	\$37,169	7.6%	4.3%	4.5%	5.2%
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Figure 2: Mean Salaries of Library Staff by Year and Positions: 1982-2004

**Figure 3. PLDS Beginning Librarian Salaries, 1988-2004
(selected years)**

	1988			1990		
Population Served	High	Low	Mean	High	Low	Mean
Over 1,000,000	\$30,088	\$16,894	\$21,977	\$27,575	\$21,306	\$24,592
500,000 to 999,999	\$29,255	\$12,444	\$21,152	\$34,016	\$17,451	\$23,458
250,000 to 499,999	\$31,573	\$15,083	\$20,296	\$30,172	\$16,000	\$23,019
100,000 to 249,999	\$34,300	\$11,627	\$19,841	\$37,800	\$13,541	\$22,208
50,000 to 99,999	\$27,857	\$14,000	\$20,194	\$32,032	\$10,920	\$21,909
25,000 to 49,999	\$24,345	\$14,528	\$19,410	\$30,060	\$8,775	\$20,890
10,000 to 24,999	\$21,368	\$15,000	\$18,290	\$28,146	\$2,149	\$19,319
5,000 to 9,999	\$16,000	\$16,000	\$0	\$23,000	\$1,000	\$16,075
Under 5,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$18,000	\$8,320	\$12,354

Figure 3 lists the beginning Librarian salaries reported to the ALA Public Library Association for selected years between fiscal years 1988-2003.^v Unlike the ALA Librarian salary survey, these salaries are reported by the size of the community served by the public library, thus providing additional detail to the position-specific salaries reported annually in the ALA Librarian salary survey. Data reported in the 1990 PLDS Statistical Report for population served fewer than 5,000 was limited to communities serving 4,999-2,500. Data reported in the 2002 and 2004 statistical report reflect fiscal year salaries, not annual salaries as in prior years.

The *ARL Annual Salary Survey 1995-1996* also noted that “purchasing power” of library workers lagged behind inflation, but that beginning librarian salaries had kept pace with inflation since 1985.^{vi} In fact, ARL reported beginning librarian salaries exceeding inflation by more than 16%. This would fit with the ALA salary data, noting in Figure 2 that beginning librarian salaries grew steadily since 1985. With the exception of 1996 (the start of a recession in the US), there was never salary loss for beginning librarians. Perhaps the best year for librarian salary growth was 1986. Even factoring for an even split in growth in 1986-87 and 1987-88, all other librarian salaries grew between 14-16% each year. Beginning Librarian salaries outpaced inflation in both 2001 and 2003. The *ARL Annual Salary Survey 2002-2003* reported salaries doing slightly better than inflation, at 1.9% for U.S. ARL library salaries.^{vii} This also is confirmed in the ALA salary data.

Applying the Salary Data: Case Studies of Public and Academic Libraries

Several library statistics and salary data sources have been used to compare and contrast mean salaries among librarians in public and academic libraries. These sources include the *ALA Survey of Librarian Salaries 1982-2004*, the Public Library Association (PLA) *Public Library Data Service Statistical Report 1982-2004*, the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) *Annual Salary Survey*, the National Center for Education Statistics *Academic Libraries: 2000* and *Public Libraries in the United States: FY2002*, and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) *Statistical Summaries for Academic Libraries 2003*.^{viii} In addition, the St. Charles City-County Library District *Library Salary Survey 2003* was consulted to compare salaries from an individual public library against national studies.

In order to understand the comparability of the various salary data available from ALA and PLA, it is important to identify specified libraries within the data. Three libraries

An annual survey of regional public libraries conducted by the St. Charles City-County Library District was consulted to compare Omaha salaries with other salary surveys.^x This study classifies public libraries by expenditures, class 5 libraries having expenditures of \$8 million or more. Omaha is a class 5 library in this study, and reported a population of 437,700, expenditures of nearly \$9.8 million with 66.6% dedicated to personnel expenditures. The starting MLS salary reported for Omaha was \$36,409, top of the scale was \$58,977. Additionally, the Assistant Director salary was reported at \$67,271 and the Director salary at \$88,691.

The average starting salary reported in the St. Charles survey for an MLS librarian employed in a library with expenditures of \$8 million or more was \$33,820. Library Assistant Director salaries averaged \$80,985. Omaha is fairing well against its regional peers, with beginning librarian salaries 7% higher.

The Public Library Association, a division of the American Library Association, reported a mean beginning salary in FY2003 of \$34,230 for the population served range that Omaha would fall, 250,000 – 499,999. The high salary reported for this ranges was \$52,344. Compared with PLDS data, Omaha is still exceeding the mean of all responding libraries serving this population by 6%. However, when compared with the *ALA Survey of Librarian Salaries 2003*exP11.2(6(i)-2.8(nnin)-1 66.8(i(lar)-17s., to59g)9.4(2;.6(r .5(y)74(es

\$53,361.48 per staff member, while Fort Vancouver Regional spends \$36,716.36, or 32% more. Add to that benefits expenditures and Omaha Public spends \$66,982.29 per staff

student assistants), total operating expenditures of \$14,065,716 (nearly \$5.2 million for salaries and wages not including student wages), and FTE student enrollment of 18,393. In the 2003 ACRL study, the University of Oregon reported an increase in staffing to 157, with the increase appearing in support not MLS staff. Expenditures for professional and support staff was nearly \$5.7 million (not including student wages).

The *ARL Annual Salary Survey: 2003-2004* is the only other comprehensive study available for comparison of salaries in academic libraries against the *ALA Survey of Librarian Salaries*.^{xiv} The ARL study reported the median salary in U.S. ARL university libraries as \$53,859. The beginning salary at UNL libraries in FY2002 was \$34,500, and in FY2003 \$36,750. The median salary paid at the UNL libraries for FY2002 was \$49,897 and in FY2003 \$49,332. Nebraska was behind its peers in median salary in FY2004 by \$4,527, or 8.4%. There also is a drop in the reported median salary paid at the UNL libraries from FY2003 to FY2004, \$565 or -1.2%.

A closer comparison of UNL libraries with all academic libraries against three characteristics - within 20% of “librarians and other professional staff,” within 20% of “total staff,” and within 10% of “full time student enrollment” - yielded four peer institutions: University of Alabama, University of Missouri-Columbia, East Carolina University, and the University of Oregon.^{xv} Salary expenditures in fiscal year 2002 for UNL libraries and its’ peer institutions based on the characteristics outlined above are presented in Figure 5.

Library Name	Salaries/Wages: Librarians and Other Professional Staff	Salaries/Wages: All Other Paid Staff
Peer Group Average	\$2,542,421	\$2,457,369
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT LINCOLN (Library of Interest)	\$2,552,991	\$2,569,375
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA	\$2,465,353	\$1,460,340
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA	\$2,538,763	\$2,796,653
EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY	\$2,284,590	\$2,613,818
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON	\$2,880,977	\$2,958,664

This comparison presents a slightly different picture of salary expenditures. Although a deeper comparison would be useful (e.g., total expenditures, collection size, etc.), when looking at staffing, salary and wage expenditures against full time enrollment UNL libraries fares a little better. Salaries for librarians and other professional staff exceed the average of the four peer institutions by nearly \$10,000, and UNL libraries are only surpassed by the University of Oregon. The University of Oregon reported the beginning librarian salary in FY 2002 of \$31,500 and \$33,000 in FY 2003 and reported the median salary paid in FY2002 as \$44,741 and \$45,458 in FY 2003. The University of Oregon

lags behind UNL by 11% in beginning librarian salary for FY 2003, and 9% in median professional salaries.

The 2003 ALA salary survey reported the mean beginning university librarian salary as \$36,999. For the Great Lakes & Plains region, the mean salary was \$37,282. The beginning librarian salary reported to ARL by UNL libraries fell below the mean national salary for this position by \$2,499, or 7%, and below the mean regional salary by \$2,782, or 7.5%. For the West and Southwest, the mean beginning librarian salary was \$35,993. The University of Oregon fell below this by 11% nationally and by 8.4% for the region. It also is interesting to see how each institution fared when compared with a representative national sample of university libraries.

We have presented data on library workforce and salaries, and now move to a review of operating expenditures and the impact of flat or slowly increasing budgets on staffing and salaries.

Library Expenditures on Personnel and Materials

Fluctuations in expenditures by type are already evident, as compared with the previous two decades. In August 2004 the Association of Research Libraries reported that electronic resource expenditures had grown by almost 400% between 1994-95 and 2001-02 to almost \$1.4 million. Further, electronic journals represent 26% of total serials expenditures. Although this is not representative of all libraries, it does demonstrate a clear trend by libraries to include electronic resources as part of its general collection. In the 2003 NCES study, public libraries reported spending approximately \$82 million for electronic materials, or 1% of total operating expenditures.

Looking at materials expenditures as a part of total library operating expenditures is one way of investigating the extent to which other components of an operating budget are impacted, such as expenditures for salaries and benefits. Another is to compare library salaries against wage gains or losses in other employment sectors, as was presented in Figure 1. Figures 6 and 7 present public library and academic library operating expenditures data for the period 1982-2004.

Figure 6: Public Library Operating Expenditures, 1982-2003				
Operating Expenditures (in thousands)				
Year	Staffing	Collections	Other	Total
[REDACTED]				

1995	\$3,391,814	\$789,158	\$1,045,243	\$5,226,215
1996	\$3,577,687	\$838,867	\$1,133,304	\$5,549,858
1997	\$3,766,515	\$890,373	\$1,200,833	\$5,857,721
1998	\$3,976,316	\$953,820	\$1,263,502	\$6,193,638
1999	\$4,244,477	\$1,014,695	\$1,372,823	\$5,718,768
2000	\$4,511,916	\$1,068,242	\$1,447,749	\$7,027,907
2001	\$4,845,852	\$1,150,890	\$1,574,902	\$7,571,644
2002	\$5,191,614	\$1,155,475	\$1,677,043	\$8,024,132
2003	\$5,407,979	\$1,140,681	\$1,665,887	\$8,214,547
Sources: National Center for Education Statistics. <i>Public Libraries in the United States</i> . 1981-1982, 1989 through 2003.				

Staffing expenditures include salaries and wages, but exclude benefits. Data listed for 1982 in "other" were detailed as equipment, computer costs, plant operation and maintenance, capital outlay, and other expenditures. Expenditures for materials in 1997

National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education 1995.
Table 409. General statistics of college and university libraries:
1974-75 to 1991-92.
<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d95/dtab409.asp>

It is important to note that academic library salary data for 1981-1988 include fringe benefits. "Other" operating expenditures reported for 1988 and 1990 include equipment,

^{vi} Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Annual Salary Survey 1995-1996, tables 3 and 12. <http://www.arl.org/stats/salary/1995-96/intro.html>

^{vii} _____. ARL Annual Salary Survey 2002-2003, table 3. <http://www.arl.org/stats/salary/1995-96/intro.html>

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