

The Employability of the Non-Accredited M.L.S. at the Junior College Level in North Carolina

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Professional employment after graduation is a goal that all students working toward the completion of a Master of Library Science (M.L.S.) degree hope to achieve. This hope of employment is becoming merely a hope in our time of rising unemployment and lessening of job opportunities in the field of library science. The graduate of a school not accredited by the American Library Association (A.L.A.) faces even greater barriers to employment. It is

this group of library graduates who are of primary importance in this article.

Recently a survey of two year colleges in North Carolina was taken to determine the employability of M.L.S. from a non-accredited school. The study attempted to determine the attitudes of employers towards candidates who seek professional positions but hold non-accredited degrees. North Carolina benefits from a vast two year college system, but

also faces the problem that there are more unemployed librarians than there are library job openings.

In his March 15, 1975 editorial in *Library Journal*, John Berry states that the days of the wide open library field and the sought after graduate are gone. No longer can a library school graduate select any geographical area or any specialization and demand high salaries.¹ The job market is already tight and there are more librarians graduating each year. In 1870 the United States Census of Population recorded only 213 recorded librarians. In 1976 this figure had risen to 115,000.²

In the United States and Canada there are sixty-four library schools that meet the standards of and are accredited by the American Library Association, and are, therefore, full members of the Association of American Library Schools. In addition there are thirty-six Associate Institutional Members which are library schools that offer professional degree programs but do not meet the standards set up by the Association's Committee on Accreditation.³ In North Carolina there are five universities that offer graduate degrees in Library Science. Of these, only two, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and North Carolina Central University, are accredited by the American Library Association.

Not having met the Association's accreditation standards, the Department of Library Science at East Carolina University is an Associate Institutional Member of the Association of American Library Schools. A comparison of the library school catalog of

East Carolina University with that of the University of North Carolina will show that both programs have basically the same objectives: to prepare professional librarians, to develop high standards of intellectual inquiry, and to provide an opportunity for continuing education.⁴ However, U.N.C. offers a deeper and more specialized program of study than E.C.U. The program at E.C.U. also seems to be strongly aimed at educating students for elementary and secondary school librarianship, whereas U.N.C.'s program seems to place more emphasis on academic librarianship.

To gather the data needed to determine the employability of holders of the non-accredited M.L.S. in junior colleges in North Carolina, the author sent the following to each school:

1. Approximate full time enrollment.
2. Size of professional library staff.
3. State or privately supported.
4. In a given year, do you receive a given number of unsolicited applications from M.L.S. holders?
5. How many professional vacancies have you filled in the last three years?
6. In reviewing prospective employee applications, does it matter where they obtained their library degree?
7. Will you employ a holder of a non-accredited M.L.S. degree for a professional position?
8. With other characteristics being similar, would you always choose an accredited M.L.S. over a non-accredited one for a

professional position, provided both candidates were available?

9. Do you currently have non-accredited M.L.S.'s on your staff in a professional position?

10. If above is "yes", what percent?

State supported schools with fewer than 1000 students were placed in one category. Those schools with 1000-1999 students were grouped in a second, and schools with 2000 or more into a third. Privately supported schools were placed in a separate category. Of the sixty questionnaires sent, fifty were responded to. Of these fifty several that were incomplete or showed misinterpretation of some questions were not tabulated in the findings.

Most junior colleges in North Carolina are state supported institutions. The greatest number of these schools have between one thousand and two thousand full time students. Nearly eighty percent of these schools yearly receive unsolicited applications from M.L.S. holders. It is important to note that nearly all junior colleges in the state have filled professional vacancies during the past three years, showing that there is a large employee turnover. Schools with fewer than one thousand students filled most of these positions. Nearly one half of all professional librarians at the junior college level have been hired during the last three years.

Most employers in junior college libraries in this state will employ a holder of a non-accredited M.L.S. in a professional position. All schools with fewer than one thousand students said that they would employ a holder of a non-accredited M.L.S. It is

notable, though, that nearly thirty percent of the private schools questioned reported that they would not employ in a professional capacity a holder of a non-accredited M.L.S. degree, despite the fact that nearly sixty percent of the professional staff in private school libraries in North Carolina have non-accredited degrees.

Forty percent of all schools questioned reported that they would choose an accredited M.L.S. over a non-accredited one, provided both applicants had similar characteristics and both were available. Eighty-six percent of the schools with one to two thousand students preferred an accredited degree, while only twenty-seven percent of the schools with more than two thousand stated a preference.

A surprising result found from this survey is the fact that there are sixty-five professionals from non-accredited library schools in junior college libraries in North Carolina, but only fifty-eight from accredited schools. It should be noted that due to incorrect responses to another question, only forty-three answers to this question could be tabulated. The category with the largest number of degrees from non-accredited institutions, seventy-one percent, had fewer than one thousand full time students. Sixty-six percent of the librarians in schools with one thousand to two thousand full time students lacked A.L.A. accredited degrees. Private schools had thirty-nine percent, and state supported schools with over two thousand students, thirty-five percent, with M.L.S. degrees from accredited schools.

Several conclusions and recommendations can be derived from an examination of the results of this study as a whole. The standards set by the American Library Association's committee on accreditation are designed to promote excellence in the training of professional librarians, a goal for which all library schools should strive. Employers in junior college libraries should recognize the high standards of education established by the A.L.A. when considering applications for employment. The capabilities of a junior college library program should reflect the capabilities of its professional personnel.

Realizing that in North Carolina there is a low turnout of accredited

M.L.S.'s compared to a high turn-over of junior college librarians, employers should weigh carefully the qualifications of each applicant. Hiring decisions should not be based entirely on the school where the M.L.S. degree was granted. Many other important factors should be carefully weighed. A school with a good basic library education program should directly influence the capabilities of the M.L.S. applicant.

Footnotes

¹John Berry, "Accredit Placement Services, Too!" *LIBRARY JOURNAL* 100 (March 15, 1975):535.

²Michael D. Cooper, "A Statistical Portrait of Librarians. What the Numbers Say" *AMERICAN LIBRARIES* 7 (June, 1976):237.

³Lucille Wert, ed., *JOURNAL OF EDUCATION FOR LIBRARIANSHIP*, (special edition, 1977):84.

⁴East Carolina University, *Department of Library Science Information Bulletin*, p. 1; and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *Catalog of the School of Library Science* (Chapel Hill, January, 1976) p. 13.

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