

Certification of Public Librarians in North Carolina

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During the last few years the subject of certification of public librarians in North Carolina has been a topic of considerable conversation among public librarians. Nowhere has this discussion been more intense than within the membership of the North Carolina Public Librarian Certification Commission.

The certification of public librarians in North Carolina goes back to 1936 with the creation of the Library Certification Board. In 1973 this Board was abolished, and the Public Librarian Certification Commission of the Department of Cultural Resources was created by statute.

The five members of this Commission are the Chairman of the North Carolina Association of Library Trustees, the Chairman of the Public Library Section of the North Carolina Library Association, an individual named by the Governor upon the nomination of the North Carolina Library Association, the Dean of a state or regionally accredited graduate school of librarianship appointed by the Governor, and one member at large appointed by the Governor. The State Librarian serves as ex-officio secretary to the Commission.

In view of events and discussion during the last year, it may be worthwhile to look briefly into the rationale for certification of public librarians in this state, the process and efforts toward maintaining a positive certification program.

Purpose of the Commission

On January 1, 1980, new and somewhat altered rules and regulations for certification became effective; they are spelled out, under the Administrative Procedures Act¹ with statutory authority. The act authorizes the Commission to set minimum standards for certification. The Commission seeks, further, to accomplish several purposes:

1. to guarantee the best possible public library service for the citizens of the state. Such service can only be assured by maintaining the highest possible degree of professionalism through providing a body of educated librarians;
2. to protect and maintain the public library resources available in the state. Again, this demands the services and attention of professional librarians;
3. to protect the public investment in North Carolina public libraries by assuring high levels of professional management and administration of library programs;
4. to protect the public interest by providing a body of certified profes-

sionals to meet the requirements of the Department of Cultural Resources for personnel responsible administering State and other aid granted to public libraries by the Division of State Library.

Requirements for Certification

Effective January 1, 1980, the North Carolina Public Librarian Certification Commission will issue public librarian certificates to:

1. Applicants who have received a graduate degree in Library and Information Science from an A.L.A. accredited school, provided at least 18 semester hours have been completed and that they include cataloging, reference, book selection, bibliography, multi-media materials, and public library administration.
2. Applicants who have received a graduate degree in Library and Information Science from a North Carolina accredited school of higher education, provided at least 18 semester hours have been completed and that they include cataloging, reference, book selection, bibliography, multi-media materials, and public library administration.
3. Applicants who have received a graduate degree in Library and Information Science from an accredited school of higher education and who have been certified by another state, provided at least 18 semester hours have been completed and that they include cataloging, reference, book selection, bibliography, multi-media materials, and public library administration.
4. Applicants receiving a graduate degree in Library and Information Science from an accredited school of higher education and who have not been certified by another state, provided at least 18 semester hours have been completed and that they include cataloging, reference, book selection, bibliography, multi-media materials, and public library administration, and who successfully qualify by passing the Comprehensive Examination in Library Science required by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Courses specifically designed for school library/media, academic, or special librarianship will not fulfill the requirement for the 18 semester hours in public librarianship cited above.

Full certification will be granted for any of the categories (1 through 4) with an appropriate public librarian certificate.

A completed application form should be sent to the Director, Division of State Library (State Librarian), accompanied by an official transcript which contains the date of conferral of the degree.

The Comprehensive Examination in Library Science will be given for applicants for certification at least three times a year.

The Certification Commission seeks, as spelled out in the Administrative Procedures Act, "to evaluate the certification process to encourage professional development beyond the minimum standards."² Consideration of this matter of professional development beyond the entry level presents the Commission one of the thorny questions with which it will have to deal in the coming years. Indeed, it is a subject with which the entire profession will have to come to grips.

In 1975 the Commission issued public librarian certificates for a period of six years. During that six years, three hours of appropriate academic credit or nine officially recorded Continuing Education Units were required for renewal of certificates. A librarian certified prior to 1975 would remain covered by rules and regulations in place when the certificate was awarded.

As 1981 loomed on the horizon, public librarians holding certificates issued under the 1975 rules began to ask questions and seek guidance. Some of the questions were: How is appropriate academic credit defined; would community college or technical institute courses be acceptable? Who determines, and when, the acceptability of courses? CEU's presented similar problems as well as some not evident in academic work.

During the 1977-79 biennium these problems were discussed at length in numerous quarters. Finally, in one of the last Planning Council meetings of the Public Library Section of the North Carolina Library Association, the question of recertification was thrown open for discussion. The value of the concept of recertification was acceptable to most of the members present. However, the lack of a clear definition of terms, how records were to be maintained and by what agency, moved the Planning Council to request that the feeling of the group be conveyed by the Section Chairman to the Certification Commission.

This input from the Planning Council of the Public Library Section of the North Carolina Library Association tied to questions of methods, procedures, record-keeping and other problems that had arisen, moved the Commission to abandon, with great reluctance, the recertification of public librarians in the state.

The field of librarianship is changing so rapidly that the practice of that profession in the public library field in North Carolina must find some alternative to one-time certification. The Commission is well aware of this condition. "The alternative to some type of a continuing education requirement is automatic renewal of certification or life certification, both of which reject the current movement in all professions to be concerned about the need for updating those practicing vital professional roles in society."³

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REFERENCES

1. N. C. General Statutes 143, Article 2, part 6.
2. Chapter 7, North Carolina Administrative Code, Sub-Chapter 2F.0001-.0004.
3. Goggin, Margaret Knox, "Certification Report to Washington State Board for the Certification of Librarians," June 1979, pg. 33.