

Minimum Qualifications For Librarians

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How should a library select a librarian? What minimum qualifications appropriate? Providing equal employment opportunity for all citizens is a critical concern. Of equal importance is the need to provide high quality information services and resources for all citizens. Often these concerns seem to be in conflict. The California "Library Selection Project" may have been the first cooperative effort to explore this dilemma on a systematic basis.

In late 1974 a number of county librarians in California began working with the Selection Consultation Center to develop what became the "Library Selection Project." Their goal was to identify persons with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to be librarians, and at the same time, to comply with federal and state laws and regulations against discrimination in employment. The project that resulted began with a review of the selection procedures of the 14 participating library systems. This was followed by a detailed analysis of all Librarian I positions in these libraries. Not surprisingly, quite a bit of variation was found to exist from library to library. Meetings were held at each library to identify the important knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics that were required for successful performance of the tasks identified.

Minimum qualifications for librarians were also studied. Minimum qualifications are pass/fail requirements that must be met before any of the other qualifications of an applicant are considered. As a part of the project methodology 36 basic tasks, identified as being the absolute minimum level necessary for entry-level librarianship, were compared with the curriculum of California library schools. (See *Library Journal*, November 15, 1977, p. 22 for a list of the 36 tasks/skills.) This comparison revealed that the minimum skills were taught in all five library schools or were prerequisites for these MLS programs. However, some of these competencies were taught in elective courses that were not taken by all students. In addition, the question of whether or not there were other ways to obtain the necessary minimum skills was not investigated. Therefore, the investigators concluded that in itself, the MLS is not a job-related minimum qualification. As a result participating libraries were advised that candidates for entry level appointments should have their transcripts evaluated on a course by course basis. The library should allow the library to satisfy itself as to whether the applicant has demonstrated the minimum competencies needed in order to qualify for further consideration.

The California Library Selection Project did not take place in a vacuum. It was part of an attempt of our society to reevaluate whether or not equal employment opportunity was being offered to all our citizens. Another manifestation of this concern took place in Ohio. In January, 1976, the Ohio Library Service Commission adopted a new classification system. In that system the requirements in the Librarian series no longer included the MLS as a minimum qualification.

The act of examining the MLS as a minimum qualification served as a catalyst to release great reservoirs of emotion. Some felt that the MLS as a minimum qualification should have been discarded long ago. Others felt that any questioning of the MLS was a serious threat to professional standards. Requests, especially from California and Ohio, began to be made for ALA to take a leadership role in this apparent conflict between the rights of all citizens to high quality information services and the rights of all citizens to equal employment opportunity. In response to these concerns the Office of Library Personnel Resources (OLPR) Advisory Committee presented a program at the 1978 ALA Annual Conference. The papers which follow were, in slightly different form, presented as a part of that program.

The papers in this symposium were presented by the following:

- Lucille M. Wert, professor of library administration and university librarian, University of Illinois,
- Henry Walton Garland, III, Los Angeles County PL,
- Glen A. Zimmerman, director of personnel and labor relations, Library of Congress,
- David R. Dowell, assistant university librarian, Duke University, and editor for the collected papers from the symposium.

Since the papers were presented in 1978 there have been other developments. In 1978 the OLPR Advisory Committee appointed a Minimum Qualifications for Librarians Task Force. The charge to the Task Force was to study the issue and recommend a course of action to ALA. In 1979 the Task Force was awarded the J. Morris Jones—World Book Encyclopedia—ALA Goals Award of \$5,000. This award made it possible for the Task Force to hold a retreat with legal and industrial psychologist experts in the field of validating employment procedures that meet federal guidelines. At the November, 1979, retreat the consultants unanimously recommended that carefully developed, job related employee selection systems are essential. They also believed that a systematic job analysis would be the first step toward validating selection procedures and demonstrating the relation between the procedures and performance on the job. The Task Force will be making recommendations during 1980 for what ALA should do to assist libraries in their employee selection procedures.

Meanwhile libraries are having to deal with the problem of minimum qualifications. The Jacksonville, Florida, Civil Service Board Classification received challenge from the Department of Personnel concerning the Public Library's use of the MLS as a minimum qualification. At the March, 1979, hearing a member of the Minimum Qualifications Task Force was one of those who provided testimony. After the hearing the Board upheld the MLS as an employment qualification.

So far no clear pattern has emerged. Yet library administrators daily must make employment decisions. An extensive annotated bibliography and a question and answer paper on minimum qualifications for librarians are available upon request from the Office for Library Personnel Resources, American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, Illinois, 60611.