

Library Technical Assistants: Are They for Real?

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In the 1970 Spring Issue of *NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES* there appeared an article on the Library Technical Assistant program at Caldwell Technical Institute in Lenoir. With the publication of this article librarians in the state were made aware that a Library Technical Assistant (LTA) program in North Carolina existed. Just recently in Greensboro at the Fall Tutorials on October 9th and 10th sponsored by the College and University Section of the North Carolina Library Association, Mrs. Rosalind Campbell, Director of the LTA program Caldwell Community College, informed the participants that there were now five such programs in the North Carolina Community College System. These are located at Beaufort Technical Institute in Beaufort, Caldwell Community College in Lenoir, Durham Technical Institute in Durham, W. W. Holding Technical Institute in Raleigh, and Lenoir Community College in Kinston. All of these programs offer the graduate a two year associate degree. Each program was established following essentially the ALA guidelines for such programs. However, the North Carolina Community College system requires State Board of Education approval before initiating a new program. Thus to begin a LTA program much prior planning goes on before the first students are admitted. Each school has an advisory committee made up of local librarians so that the individual programs do not go astray.

There is within the Community College system a state advisory committee, again composed of library personnel from across the state. Presently this advisory committee is working on a suggested new curriculum which stresses more the multimedia concept which is taking place in more and more libraries.

Generally the Library Technology program is designed to prepare persons for employment in various types of libraries — public, school, college, university, hospital, government, and industry. The curriculum provides a background of general education and basic library skills to prepare interested students to enter library work above the minimum clerical status. It also introduces a variety of library experiences into which a trained person may enter, suiting abilities to the particular job. The library content courses are not designed to transfer as library science courses in the full professional degree program at an accredited library school; however, the library courses would be helpful as background for students desiring to enter the professional library field, and the business courses could provide a good background for further business training. Thus the graduate of the Library Technology program confronts a variety of career opportunities.

There is a growing need for men and women to assist librarians by assuming the many technical and clerical responsibilities essential to the operation of the

modern library. The Library Technician is a library worker who has graduated from a program in Library Technology with an Associate in Applied Science degree with a definite major in courses in Library Technology. He is capable of work in support of professional librarians. Library Technicians will generally follow established procedures which have been developed by librarians. Under the librarian's supervision, he can be expected to have sufficient knowledge and skills to perform the assigned or routine duties in the library and in some cases to be capable of supervision of untrained library clerical personnel. In a closely coordinated library system, a Library Technician may be responsible for a service unit.

On the national level many library associations have embraced in principal the need and place of LTA's in the library organizational structure. However there are many problems left unsolved. The Council on Library Technology was established nationally to promote LTA's all across the United States. Various COLT committees work to help various schools in developing curriculum, instruction, and advising in any other capacity that is required.

In North Carolina, each of the five institutions which have LTA programs are somewhat different in the number and type of courses that a student is required to take. However, most adhere to the ALA guidelines and also to the curriculum guide put out by the North Carolina Department of Community Colleges. Library technician courses constitute 25 percent, 50 percent are related to general education, and the remaining 25 percent to business skills. Due to the newness of most of the programs at this time, library personnel in these institutions are actively involved in teaching and directing the program. Most of those involved with the program will admit that for the LTA program to succeed a full time director or coordinator for the program is needed. With the multimedia concept fast taking hold in education, particularly in the public school system and the community colleges, some of the institutions in the North Carolina community

college system are offering associate degrees in related media areas: audiovisual or media technician, media production technician, media equipment technician and graphics technician. With these programs including the LTA program, the North Carolina community college system is doing a lot to provide libraries, media centers, and learning resources centers with the para- or sub-professional library staff needed to provide the services which patrons need or want. With all of these technicians graduating then it would lead one to believe that North Carolina libraries are in great shape. Yet the evidence does not indicate such is the case. Then what's wrong? First, librarians in general are afraid of this new breed of library worker because it will be capable of doing those library tasks or jobs which we librarians hate to do or in most cases do not have time to do. I'm talking about verifying, processing book orders, simple cataloging, routine circulation procedures, displays, filing, story telling, routine reference questions, and many other routine assignments which consume much of our time and which these graduates are being trained to do. Our problem is that we feel they will replace us and that we can not let this happen. I was amazed at the attitude of librarians when I began a local survey of the needs of the LTA in our area prior to implementing the program at Durham Technical Institute—librarians I have known for years and felt would welcome the LTA graduate to relieve them so they would be free to do the things they were trained to do in library school. Yet, this was not the case. Many felt the LTA would take away their jobs or that we could never train a person to operate in a library system in two years. Also, it was noted that librarians still feel that taking a liberal arts major and training them on the job is more economical than hiring a two-year LTA graduate that can function on the first day at work. Many librarians across our state and nation feel this same way, I'm afraid. In some states LTA's are accepted. All North Carolina libraries both public, private, school, college, and special

need these people and should work hard to establish such positions. Even within the North Carolina community college system where we are training these people, the libraries of the institutions do not have a job classification for them. The public school system in our state doesn't have a position as such, although they are hired as library clerks or aides. Even the greater university of our state does not have a library staff classification that fits their training. Between the non-professional and the professional on library staffs there is a gap, and for years librarians, administrators, and others in an administrative capacity have done very little to solve this problem. The federal government, California, Ohio, and other states have accepted the LTA graduate and provide for their classification in all types of libraries. Canadian libraries for years have recognized their importance and work closely with those schools which have LTA programs establishing positions to fit their training. Presently, some of the librarians in our state who have the foresight to see further down the road are working to get positions for LTA's both on the state and local level allocated to their present library staff.

Many librarians still cling to the idea that a library houses only books and that non-print items do not belong, nor do they wish to become involved with other types of materials now available to their patrons. Yet, the LTA is trained to handle all types of media both print and non-print. In fact, they are capable of producing media where none exists. My point is that these LTA's arrive on the scene trained and then librarians tend to try to make them over into their own image and this turns a lot of LTA's off. So in some ways we are either driving them out of the library or to another job, usually out of the state to where their training is respected, utilized, and appreciated. Fortunately for North Carolina, there does exist a large job potential in this area and most of the graduates of the LTA program do remain in the state, but for how long is up to us.

I believe that the North Carolina Li-

brary Association has failed to take the initiative and make LTA's welcome within our state library organization. Regional, county, and local library organizations probably have done more than the North Carolina Library Association. In fact, a resolution, a special committee, or a study group to study these problems might help more than the North Carolina Library Association getting involved with endorsing social legislation or other matters not related to the library or its problems. The graduates of our LTA programs are bright, intelligent, and willing to learn, and can offer much to library service for our state, community, and citizens. We need these people on our library staffs, so let's see what we can do in the North Carolina Library Association and the state to make them feel welcome within our library associations.

In talking with librarians, I find that non-professional staff turnover is one of their many problems. My answer then is that maybe the LTA is the solution. These people are looking for a permanent job. They are not looking for a temporary job while husband or wife gets a degree or finds a job. Also we need to redefine the librarians role to fit in with new library concepts in the twentieth century. Many librarians across this state are being called upon to do much more than what most people believe librarians should do. Recognizing the LTA and their role in today's library organization will help upgrade the librarians' position both in importance and also in salaries. We cannot put the LTA graduates aside. They are here to stay and the sooner we get these people into our library staff organization the better off all of us will be.

In North Carolina, these five Library Technical Assistant programs are turning out quite a number of graduates each year. Using Durham Technical Institute as an example, we started in September 1971 with 7 students. By May we had 16 enrolled in the program. This past September we began with twenty-one students. So you can see the program is

growing fast. I am sure that other schools with the program are experiencing the same growth. In the Research Triangle area the job potential is there. How many libraries will employ or take advantage of these graduates we will see in May with our first graduating class. All of us involved in teaching or working in the LTA programs in North Carolina recognize there are still problems not only with the curriculum itself, but in teaching, students, attitudes and others that appear from time to time. Yet, we feel that there is a place in the library for the LTA, and we are working constantly to see this idea becomes a reality. I am sure that those of us involved as program directors or coordinators welcome your comments either pro or con, suggestions, and support. For those of you who are in the dark as to what the Library Technical Assistant is and what their roles as related to the library are, I would suggest you might read the article by Sister May C. Rudnik in the *WILSON LIBRARY BULLETIN*, September 1971, as Sister Rudnik tells it like it is and gives an accurate account of the new breed called Library Technical Assistant. Also I am sure that if after reading her article you want a first hand encounter with these

individuals, then you might take time and visit one of the five schools which have these programs. As stated, each program varies somewhat but essentially our purposes and objectives are the same. Our objective is to provide libraries in North Carolina with a sub- or para-professional who can help professional librarians to get about doing the things they were trained and hired to do. Thus, it is time that library administrators take a good hard look at their staff classifications and proceed to make room for this new library worker so that they can be in a position to hire this person as more and more Library Technical Assistants graduate. Yes, Library Technical Assistants are for real. Employ one and you'll wonder how you ever got along without them.

REFERENCES

- Hill, William M., "The Library Technical Assistant Program at Caldwell Technical Institute," *North Carolina Libraries*, 28 (Spring 1970), 57-65.
- Rudnik, Sister Mary Chrysanthia, "What Every Librarian Should Know About Library Technical Assistants," *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 46 (September 1971), 67-72.

Want to see more names or more libraries in the news? Here's the person to give your news items to:

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES:

Leland M. Park
Library of Davidson College
Davidson, North Carolina 28036

JUNIOR COLLEGE LIBRARIES:

Jean McDuffie
Central Piedmont Community College Library
Charlotte, North Carolina 28204

SPECIAL LIBRARIES:

William Lowe
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, North Carolina 27607

PUBLIC LIBRARIES:

Ray N. Moore
Durham City-County Public Library
Durham, North Carolina 27702

SCHOOL MEDIA CENTERS:

Pauline Myrick
Moore County School System
Carthage, North Carolina 27327