

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)

Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

November 2009

Hiring the Reference Librarian: An Examination of Duty Equivalents

Beatrice Priestly

Long Branch Public Library, priestlyb@netzero.net

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Priestly, Beatrice, "Hiring the Reference Librarian: An Examination of Duty Equivalents" (2009). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 299.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/299>

Hiring the Reference Librarian: An Examination of Duty Equivalents

Beatrice Priestly
Principal Librarian
Long Branch Public Library
Long Branch, New Jersey 07740

Adjunct Librarian
Monmouth University
West Long Branch, New Jersey 07764

Introduction

To provide an examination of reference librarian duty equivalents in other careers, to provide a calculation of the weighted worth in wages culminating in a recommended hiring salary. It proposes other job titles whose duties relate to portions of the reference librarian's day and provides a calculated view of the duties' weighted worth after close examination of the United States Government Bureau of Labor Statistics web site at www.bls.gov and their presentation of wage earnings data collected May 2006 and then posted to their website April 2007. This website was examined during May 2007.

The reference librarian has varied duties each day. Portions of these duties are similar to duties performed in other occupations, such as personal shopper, warehouse stock picker, etc. An examination of the annual and hourly earnings of various occupations allows one compose the standard hour of duties of the librarian in a given week of equivalent duties. By weighting the duties in terms of (Part One) 38.5 minutes per hour on answering questions using expertise and the rest of the hour (Part Two) on assorted other duties, we can come to a finding on the proper compensation for the entry level librarian.

Literature Review

Early explorations of this topic include Munford (1936), who gives a rudimentary examination of librarians' tasks. Plater (1995) examines discussions in academia on the changing nature of work. Oberg (1997) recognizes that as librarian duties have changed it has affected the duties of the library support staff. Intner (1998) examines good professional practice and what librarians will be doing in the future. She states that "good professionals" must analyze needs, make plans, set priorities, allocate budgets and other resources, engage vendors and negotiate contracts with them, direct and train staff, monitor and evaluate performance, and initiate the process anew when a planning cycle is completed.

Reilly (2003) describes state mandates for school librarians, saying that they are not unlike what librarians are already experiencing: the need to be all things in all situations.

RUSA (2003) is a list of professional competencies and the tasks involved. RUSA defines reference librarians as "those who assist, advise, and instruct users in accessing all forms of recorded knowledge. The assistance, advice, and instruction include both direct and indirect service to patrons." The report provides goals and objectives. The competencies and tasks include: responsiveness; organization and design of services; critical thinking and analysis; knowledge base; environmental scanning; application of knowledge; dissemination of knowledge; active learning; marketing awareness and informing; assessment; communication and outreach; evaluation; collaboration; relationship with

users; relationships with colleagues; relationships with the profession; relationships beyond the library and profession; evaluation and assessment of resources and services; user needs; information services; information resources; service delivery; information interfaces; information service providers.

Cardina and Wicks (2004) took a closer look at the changing roles of librarians. The authors assessed changes in roles from 1991-2001. They studied a number of librarians and their activities and the amount of time spent on them. They found that “automation of information systems has been the driving force behind transformations of both the library environment and reference services practices.”

Graham and McAbee (2005) discuss subject specialist duties, including reference, collection management, instruction, and liaison activities. The authors report on the results of a survey, which found that most of the subject specialist time was spent at the reference desk, which most respondents said was their most valuable task. They state however, that “traditional subject specialist duties such as consultations, developing print collections in their subjects, and spending time serving as a liaison to faculty in assigned departments also rank among the top five valuable duties.”

Methods

The author gathered data from 2004-2007 on tasks performed by reference librarians. The author submitted her own observations to colleagues for comment, agreement, and disagreement about the tasks and the time devoted to them. The data showed that, in a 35- hours week, duties were divided as follows.

- Reference (helping find answers to questions)
- Collection development
- Designing instructional handouts
- Email responses
- Bibliographic instruction
- Professional development

These are similar to the top five discussed by Cardina and Wicks (2004) and Graham and McAbee (2005). There are other duties that round out the week of the public library reference librarian.

Two-part Examination of the Composite Hour

This is an examination of reference librarian duty equivalents using US Government Bureau of Labor Statistics Standard Occupation Classifications (codes and titles); using May 2006 salary estimates and assigning weights to number of questions per hour. The estimate is based on an average of 5.5 reference questions per hour, with an estimated 7 minutes spent answering each question. The duties will be divided into Part One: direct customer service, helping to answer questions, for 38.5 minutes of a composite hour and Part Two: the remaining 22 minutes of that composite hour spent on other duties that will serve customers but which do not involve direct contact with them. Both types of duties are performed while the librarian is on the desk. The result is a composite standard “one hour of duty” within the librarian's work week.

Reference librarians have varied duties each day. Portions of these duties are similar to duties performed in other occupations, such as personal shopper, warehouse stock picker, and so on. An examination of the annual and hourly earnings of these positions allows one compose a standard hour of librarian duties in a given week. The duties are weighted, so that 38.5 minutes per hour involves direct customer contact using expertise to answer questions, with the rest of the hour (approximately 22 minutes) spent on assorted other duties. This analysis can help determine proper compensation for the entry level librarian.

Bureau of Labor Statistics

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics website www.bls.gov has data on occupations and salaries. The Bureau gathers prevailing wage data in 800 occupational categories in the US every year. Mean annual salaries, mean hourly wages, and other data presented as a national aggregate and sometimes broken down by area of the country is posted on their web site. The Bureau This web site was examined from May 13- 20, 2007.

Librarian Duties

Part One: Answering reference questions.

Activities in answering reference questions:

Reader's Advisory:

- BLS equivalent:
- 43-4051 Customer service Representatives
- Mean annual wage \$30,400
- Hourly portion: approximately 1.5 questions.
- Hourly $\$14.61 = .2435 \times 10.5 \text{ minutes} = \2.556 per part hours

Check catalogs and shelves for phoned in requests for materials.

- BLS equivalent:
- 43-5081 Stock clerk and Order fillers
- Mean annual wage \$22,440.
- Hourly portion: approximately 1 question.
- Hourly $\$10.79 = .1798 \times 7 \text{ minutes} = \1.258 per part hour

Bibliographic instruction

- BLS equivalent
- 25-1021 Computer Science Teachers, Post secondary teach courses in computer science.
- Mean Annual Wage \$65,000.
- Hourly portion: approximately 1 question.
- Hourly $\$31.25 = .5208 \times 7 \text{ minutes} = \3.646 per part hour

Explain the use of legal information resources

- BLS equivalent:
- 23-2011 Paralegal: Assist lawyers by researching legal precedent, investigating facts, or preparing legal documents. Conduct research to support a legal proceeding, to formulate a defense, or to initiate legal action.
- Mean Annual Wage \$45,460.
- Hourly portion: approximately .33 question.
- Hourly $\$21.86 = .3643 \times 2.31 \text{ minutes} = .8415$ per part hour

Explain the use of medical information resources

- BLS equivalent:

- 29-1111 Registered Nurse: Assess patient health problems and needs, develop and implement nursing care plans, and maintain medical records. Administer nursing care to ill, injured, convalescent, or disabled patients. May advise patients on health maintenance and disease prevention or provide case management.
- Mean Annual Wage: \$ 59,730
- Hourly portion: approximately .66 question.
- Hourly \$28.71 = .4785 x 4.62 minutes = \$2.21 per part hour

Provide information on social services

- BLS equivalent:
- 21-1021 Child, Family, and School Social Worker: provide social services and assistance to improve the social and psychological functioning of children and their families
- Mean Annual Wage \$40,640
- Hourly portion: approximately .25 question.
- Hourly \$19.54 = \$.3257 x 1.75 minutes = .5699 per part hour.

Provide tourist and visitor information

- BLS equivalent:
- 11-2031 Public Relations Managers: plan and direct public relations programs designed to create and maintain a favorable public image for employer or client.
- Mean Annual Wage: \$92,250
- Hourly portion: approximately .25 question.
- Hourly \$44.35 = \$.7392 x 1.75 minutes = \$1.294 per part hour.

Conduct research

- BLS equivalent:
- 27-3041 Editors: Performs a variety of editorial duties such as layout, indexing, and revising content of written materials, in preparation for final publication.
- Mean Annual wage \$53,220
- Hourly portion: approximately .5 question.
- Hourly \$25.59 = \$.4265 x 3.5 minutes = \$1.49 per part hour.

Answering one question in each of these eight categories takes 38.5 to 40 minutes of the librarian's hour. One can add together salaries for the portion of time spent on each equivalent duty and arrive at a prevailing wage for this portion of the composite hour: \$13.87.

Librarian Duties, Continued

Part two: Duties that do not involve direct customer contact.

Compile daily, weekly, and monthly task sheets which must be tallied and added to provide a monthly statistical report. Reports are made on number of computer users and number of database uses for the month. Statistical reports are made to report to the state library annually.

- 15-2041- Statisticians: Engage in the development of mathematical theory or apply theory and methods to collect, organize, interpret, and summarize numerical data to provide for usable information.
- Mean Annual Wage: \$69,080

- Approximate time: 3 minutes per hour
- Hourly wage: $\$33.21 = \$.554 \times 3 = \$1.662$ per portion of hour.

Acquisitions: receive and distribute publisher mail to appropriate subject librarian.

- BLS equivalent:
- 11-9131 Postmasters and Mail superintendents: Direct and coordinate operational, administrative, management, and supportive services of a US post office; or coordinate activities of workers engaged in related work.
- Mean annual wage: \$55,630
- Approximate time: .5 minutes per hour
- Hourly wage: $\$26.74 = \$.446 \times .5 = \$2.23$ per part hour.

Read emails and contribute to discussion or act on Director assignments; keep up with competitive intelligence on other libraries' holdings within NJ .

- BLS equivalent:
- 11-2021 Marketing Manager: Determine demand for products and services offered by a firm identify potential customers. Develop price strategies to maximize profits and share of market.
- Mean Annual Wage: \$107,610
- Approximate time: 4 minutes per hour
- Hourly wage: $\$51.74 = \$.862 \times 4 \text{ minutes} = \3.448

Read reviews, work on order requests

- BLS equivalent:
- 41-4012: Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except technical. Sell goods for wholesalers or manufacturers to business or groups of individuals. Work requires substantial knowledge of items sold.
- Mean Annual Wage: \$58,540
- Approximate time: 5 minutes per hour
- Hourly wage: $\$28.14 = \$.469 \times 5 \text{ minutes} = \2.345

Be responsible for materials budgets

- BLS equivalent:
- 13-2031 Budget Analysts: Examine budget estimates for completeness, accuracy, and conformance with procedures and regulations. Analyze budgeting and accounting reports for the purpose of maintaining expenditure controls.
- Mean annual wage: \$63,920
- Approximate time: 2 minutes per hour
- Hourly wage: $\$30.73 = \$.512 \times 2 = \$1.024$ per part hour.

Keep up-to-date with local and national news

- BLS equivalent:
- 27-3021 Broadcast News Analysts: analyze, interpret, and broadcast news received from various sources.
- Mean Annual Wage: \$66,910.
- Approximate time: 1 minute per hour.
- Hourly wage: $\$32.17 = \$.536 \times 1 = \$.536$ per part hour.

Professional discussion and advancement

- BLS equivalent:
- 25-1082: Library Science teachers, postsecondary: Teach courses in library science. Include both teachers primarily engaged in teaching and those who do a combination of both teaching and research.
- Mean annual wage: \$57,550
- Approximate time: 2 minutes per hour.
- Hourly wage: $\$27.67 = .4612 \times 2 = \$.9224$ per part hour

Observe and monitor design of library to maximize efficiency.

- BLS equivalent:
- 17-2112: Industrial Engineers: Design, develop, test, and evaluate integrated systems for managing industrial production processes including human work factors, quality control, inventory control, logistics and materials flow, cost analysis, and production coordination.
- Mean annual wage: \$70,630
- Approximate time: 5 minutes per hour.
- Hourly wage: $\$33.96 = \$.566 \times .5 = \$.283$ per part hour.

Physical management of collection

- BLS equivalent:
- 11-3071: Transportation, storage, and distribution managers. Plan, direct, or coordinate transportation storage or distribution activities in accordance with governmental policies and regulations. Include logistics managers.
- Mean annual wage: \$78,560
- Approximate time: 1 minute per hour.
- Hourly wage: $\$37.77 = \$.6295 \times 1 \text{ minute} = \$.629$ per part hour.

Analyze and coordinate work projects

- BLS equivalent:
- 13-1111: Management Analyst: Conduct organizational studies and evaluations, design systems, and procedures, conduct work simplifications and measurement studies, and prepare operations and procedures manuals to assist management in operating more efficiently and effectively.
- Mean Annual Wage: \$77,270
- Approximate time: .5 minutes per hour.
- Hourly wage $\$37.15 = .6191 \times .5 = \$.31$ per part hour.

Assign call numbers

- BLS equivalent:
- 25-4011: Archivists, Curators, and Museum technicians: Appraise, edit, and direct safekeeping or permanent records and historically valuable documents, participates in research activities based on archival materials.
- Mean annual wage: \$44,400
- Approximate time: 2 minutes per hour.
- Hourly wage: $\$21.35 = \$.356 \times 2 = \$.712$ per part hour.

Oversee computers and call for help when needed

- BLS equivalent:
- 15-1041: Computer support specialists: Provide technical assistance to computer system users. Answer questions or resolve computer problems.
- Mean annual wage: \$44,350
- Approximate time: .5 minutes per hour.
- Hourly wage: $\$21.32 = \$.355 \times .5 = \$.178$ per part hour.

The subtotal for Part Two (22 minutes) is \$14.28.

The proper hiring wage for the composite hour is computed as follows:

Reference librarian duties:

- Part One: Answering questions: \$13.87
- Part Two: Preparing library, collection, and staff: \$ 14.28
- That totals \$28.15 per hour.
- At 35 hours per week, this comes to: \$51,233

Comments

The reference librarian must have a broad and deep knowledge about the areas of specialization within librarianship. There are specialized positions such as collection development librarian, acquisitions librarian, catalog librarian, interlibrary loan librarian, and serials librarian. Then there is the general reference librarian who must have a general command of all these specialties. It is necessary to pay for this additional knowledge.

Not only is the reference librarian a jack-of-all-trades within the library field itself –in hiring the reference librarian the library is obtaining a jack-of-all-trades for a number of other professions. Surely there is value in the variety of services provided by one person.

The librarian does all behind-the-scenes duties while helping customers. It takes a special person to be able to frequently interrupt themselves and then easily find their place again and continue. The term “interrupt” is used loosely, since it is common knowledge that the main reason librarians are working is to help customers, but nevertheless, the other tasks still need to be done.

The librarian comes to the job with a Master's degree. This is an advanced degree and should command advanced pay. Comparable master's degrees such as the MBA usually claim salaries of \$59,600 – \$77,200 or more.

The librarian usually works the “second shift,” which means their work includes evening and weekend hours without benefit of earning what is commonly called differential pay.

The librarian comes to libraries from school with a Master's degree and best of intentions to serve well. Every effort must be made to ensure a decent salary upon which one can pay the rent, heating bills, the car payment, the student loan, and buy food. These are not too much to ask for in return for hard work, dedication, and a great deal of expertise.

Works Cited

Cardina, C., & Wicks, D. (2004). The changing role of academic reference librarians over a ten-year period. *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 44 (2): 133-142.

Graham, J. B., & McAbee, S.L. (2005). Expectations, realities, and perceptions of subject specialist librarian duties in medium-sized academic libraries. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 31 (1): 19-28.

Intner, S. (1998). The good professional: A new vision. *American Libraries* 29 (3): 48-50.

Munford, W. A. (1936). On the activities of the librarian. *Library World* 38: 277-279.

Oberg, L. R. (1997). Library support staff deployment and utilization: Achieving clarity in an age of change. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 23: 42-43.

Plater, W. M. (1995). Future work. *Change* 27: 22-33.

Reilly, R. (2003). A librarian? By any other name probably means more work! *Multimedia Schools* 10 (3): 61-62.

RUSA Task Force on Professional Competencies (2003). Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians: RUSA Task Force on Professional Competencies. *Reference and User Services Quarterly* 42 (4): 290-295.

US Bureau of Labor Statistics. <http://www.bls.gov>

| Summary of hourly tasks | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Questions Per Hour | Subject | Occupational Equivalent | Time spent on Question per hour | Time Spent on this type of Question each week |
| 1.5 questions per hr. | Reader's Advisory | Customer Service Representative | 10 minutes | 4 hours |
| 1 | check catalog or shelf | Stock clerk | 7 | 3 |
| 1 | Bibliographic Instruction | Secondary/computer sci teacher | 7 | 3 |
| 0.33 | Using Legal resources | Paralegal | 2.31 | 1 |
| 0.66 | Finding basic medical information | Nurse | 4.62 | 2 |
| 0.25 | Social Guidance (food bank, jobs) | Social Worker | 1.75 | 0.72 |
| 0.25 | Act as City representative (maps,) | Public relations Manager | 1.75 | 0.72 |
| 0.5 | mailed In, Phoned, email research | Editor | 3.5 | 1.5 |
| | | | 38 minutes per hour | 15.94 hours per week |
| | | | 38 minutes of every hour spent on reference or reference like duties is spent with this variety of questions. | |
| | | | | An average of 16 hours per week is spent on reference or reference like duties answering questions. |

| Hourly tasks and BLS equivalent | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Minutes per hour | Task | Occupational Equivalent | Hours spent per week on Duty | Hours spent per Month |
| 3 | Prepare Statistical reports | Statistician | 1.75 hours per week | 7 hours per month |
| 0.5 | Sort Publisher's snail, email | Postmaster | 0.29 | 1.16 |
| 4 | Search for competitive intelligence | Marketing Manager | 2.33 | 9.32 |
| 5 | Read review journals | Sales Representative | 2.92 | 11.6 |
| 2 | Budget allocations | Budget Analyst | 1.16 | 4.64 |
| 1 | Read weekly newspaper | News Analysts | 0.583 | 2.33 |
| 2 | Participate in Professional work | Library Science Teacher | 1.16 | 4.64 |
| 0.5 | Library Design Management | Industrial Engineer | 0.2916 | 1.166 |
| 1 | Physical management weeding | Transportation/Distribution Manager | 0.583 | 2.332 |
| 0.5 | Project management with staff | Management Analyst | 0.29 | 1.16 |
| 0.2 | Assign call numbers | Records Manager or Archivist | 1.16 | 4.64 |
| 0.5 | Oversee computers | Computer Support Specialist | 0.29 | 1.16 |