

Employer expectations and changes in the workplace

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There is currently a high level of interest in the status and future of the information professions, in our case specifically in that of librarians. An investigation of current status could be approached many different ways. We began by looking at job advertisements (ads) because they 'bluntly state necessary and desired employer requirements from candidates' (Cullen 2004). Our conclusions are based on two empirical studies. In the first we compared job ads from Australia and the US (Marion et al. 2005) over two months in 2004. The second consists of snapshots of four weeks of Australian job ads from 1974, 1984, 1994 and 2004 (Kennan, Willard et al. 2005).

The findings indicate that the major difference between employer requirements in Australia and the US is the basic qualification requirement. In the US the basic qualification is a masters degree. In Australia entry-level programs exist at undergraduate, post-graduate diploma and masters level. The uniformity of course type and structure in the US makes the specification of qualification easier for employers than in Australia with its several levels of education offering a route to an accredited qualification.

Comparing the job ads showed some similarities between the two countries. Interpersonal skills (communication, negotiation), behavioural characteristics (creativity, self-motivation) and technical services are required very frequently in the ads of both countries. In Australia the occurrences of the

terms 'management' and 'common workplace requirements' (EEO, ethics) are much more frequent than in the US, and the reverse is true for web design and maintenance and information services (which includes information literacy, reader education etc.).

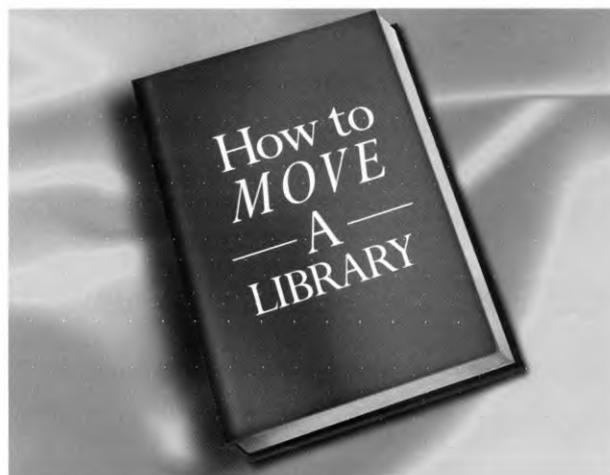
From the Australian multi-year snapshot study it was immediately evident that the ads themselves had changed markedly since 1974, when brief, simple ads calling for reference services or technical services librarians or librarians with management skills predominated, to long wordy ads for multi-skilled information-related jobs in 2004.

The increasing lack of reference to specific qualifications and the increasing requirement for experience makes us wonder how new graduates obtain their first appointment. The ads suggest a growing lack of clarity about the skills and competencies of librarians; for example, almost all the ads in 1974 called for skills clearly within the library and information services (LIS) domain, whereas by 2004 only 45 per cent asked for established LIS skills.

Many of the job ads in both studies ask for skills and competencies that are not, and cannot, be claimed as specific LIS skills. What is the nature of the LIS profession? An accepted body of knowledge, coupled with a system of certifying that individuals have mastered that body of knowledge are often seen as key elements of a profession. Abbott (1988, 1998) terms this body of knowledge the profession's 'jurisdiction'. Claiming, maintaining and re-claiming jurisdiction is an ongoing task for a profession. A paper for the 2nd Research Applications in Information and Library Studies (RAILS) Seminar looks at this issue in more detail (Kennan, Cole et al. 2005).

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