

LIS Investigations:

are LIS graduates really getting non-traditional jobs?

Where ALIA's Research Committee brings you news from the world of library and information services research.



FROM OUR COLLECTION:

Marshall, J.D. (2012), Workforce trends, issues and values, *Information Services & Use* 32, 153-157.

In writing the LIS: Investigations column for this issue, members of ALIA's Research Advisory Committee have been aiming to write pieces that align with specific feature themes in INCITE. This month, I was interested in exploring the Association's subscription journals for research into careers outside the library for library and information services graduates. As an educator, I have a strong interest, not just in research but specifically in research that can tell me where our graduates are finding employment.

For over a decade the literature and conference papers, from research papers to opinion pieces, have told us that there are growing opportunities for LIS graduates outside the 'traditional' library sector. This article by Joanne Marshall caught my eye because the topic speaks to ongoing concerns about education and workforce planning. Marshall writes from the perspective of a librarian (primarily in health sciences libraries) and an LIS educator in the US and Canada. For this paper, she draws on both professional experience and research. She points out that her experience in the health sector exposed her to 'evidence-based medicine' and a series of tutorials called Critical Appraisal of the Literature, in which health librarians participated. These stimulated her interest in research, suggesting information professionals should also be evidence based in their practice.

Indeed, she argues, as resources continue to shrink, all publicly-funded institutions 'are being challenged to demonstrate their value' – something that our own

profession in Australia has embraced. It would be worth reading more, for instance, of Marshall's most recent research into measuring the value of library and information services in patient care.

ONE OF THE GAPS IN THE RESEARCH OF THE PAST FEW YEARS, HOWEVER – UNLESS I'VE MISSED SOMETHING – IS WHETHER LIS GRADUATES ARE ACTUALLY COMPETING FOR THESE NON-TRADITIONAL POSITIONS THAT ARE POTENTIALLY AVAILABLE TO THEM.

On what she calls 'workforce tracking', Joanne has led a series of research projects that provide in-depth career studies of LIS graduates. The second of these involves 39 programs in an alumni tracking study, while the outcomes of her current study is a guide for LIS researchers who want to make their research data more widely available. These projects, she says, have emphasised for her the need for ongoing data collection about the LIS workforce, 'as it morphs and changes in response to the changing landscape of information work'.

Such research is of great value to the profession, particularly if Marshall is correct to claim that few university programs have the resources to track the careers of their alumni on a regular basis. In Australia, the key 2011 Australian Learning and Teaching Council

(ALTC) report, *Re-conceptualising and Re-positioning Australian Library and Information Science Education for the 21st Century* (Final Report, 2011) (www.liseducation.org.au/resources/PP9-1326%20QUT%20Partridge%20Final_Report.pdf) suggests that in-depth research about LIS graduate destinations in Australia is equally limited. The report itself remedies this to some extent with its survey of LIS graduates. It found that, outside library work, the next six categories of work provided most often in graduates' descriptions of their work, were information technology, research, knowledge management, content management, document management and records management.

It is worth adding that the workforce part of the ALTC study included a job advertisement content analysis, designed to identify jobs potentially available to information professionals in the employment market. The majority of positions identified were traditional LIS professional jobs but there were a significant proportion of non-traditional job categories, particularly jobs in the information and knowledge management and enterprise

content management category and positions in the category of web content and production.

One of the gaps in the research of the past few years, however – unless I've missed something – is whether LIS graduates are actually competing for these non-traditional positions that are potentially available to them. That would require a follow-up to discover who ended up with the positions advertised – an LIS graduate or someone else competing for the same turf. Answers to this kind of question are important, both to educators like me and to LIS graduates, especially those who have acquired the understandings and skills required to work outside the library sector.

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