ASK NOT WHAT YOUR PROFESSION CAN DO FOR YOU?

SURVEYING ART LIBRARIAN CAREERS AND ATTITUDES

EAMON TEWELL
REFERENCE & INSTRUCTION LIBRARIAN
LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY, BROOKLYN
@EAMONTEWELL
This presentation discusses the results of an international survey of art librarian careers, including:

- Motivation for selecting the profession
- Educational background
- Current employment
- Professional experiences
1. Was art librarianship a career goal for most professionals currently in the field?

2. Why do individuals choose a career in art librarianship?

3. What factors contributed to current professionals successfully obtaining a position as an art librarian?
Little found in the literature as a whole (with the exception of LIS student reasons for selecting LIS)

Even less found for librarians in art/museum/VR settings
Survey: 33 item instrument developed and distributed to six email discussion groups

[arts-lib] ACRL Arts Section
[arlis-l] Art Libraries Society of North America
[carlis-l] ARLIS/NA Canada
[arlis-norden] ARLIS Nordic
[arlis-link] ARLIS/UK & Ireland
[ifla-art] IFLA Art Library Section
METHODOLOGY

- Survey conducted in April 2012
- Data collected via Google Forms & analyzed using Excel
- 280 complete responses received from across the world
RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

**Gender:** Females represented 84% of the respondents

**Age:** Relatively even distribution among age groups between 27 and 62

**Location:** Majority of responses from the United States (57%) and the United Kingdom (18%)
### RESULTS: RESPONDENTS BY AGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-35</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-44</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-53</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54-62</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63+</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### RESULTS: RESPONDENTS’ LOCATIONS (TOP 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>260</strong></td>
<td><strong>92.9</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which area best describes your job duties?

- Generalist: 34%
- Public Services: 27%
- Administrative: 16%
- Other: 13%
- Technical Services: 8%
- Digital Services: 3%
RESULTS: CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SETTING

- Museum: 28%
- Academic: 58%
- Archives: 1%
- Special: 2%
- Other: 6%
- Public: 2%
RESULTS: EMPLOYMENT BY DURATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Employed in Library of Any Type**
- **Employed in Art Librarianship**
RESULTS: EDUCATION

Undergraduate Education
Art History (35%) and Art/Studio Art (12%) most common bachelor’s/equivalent

Graduate Education
57% obtained second masters, including:
- Art History (52%)
- Art/Studio Art (16%)
- Architecture (11%)
RESULTS: CAREER GOALS

Top reasons for pursuing the profession

- Job Functions (179 respondents)
- Work Setting (146)
RESULTS: CAREER GOALS

Not reasons for choosing art librarianship

- “Compensation” (40 respondents)
- “Recommendation from friend or co-worker” (49)
At what point did you decide to pursue ___ as a career?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Librarianship</th>
<th>Art Libr.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In High School</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In College</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad Program Other Than LIS</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While Working in Library Field</td>
<td><strong>94</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While Working in Non-Lib Field</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In LIS Graduate Program</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What factors (either positive or negative) have had the strongest influence on your career choice?

- Passion for both art and public service
- Disillusion with a previous career choice
- Stability of the job
“I needed a career change and felt that my love of art should be a part of my next career.”

“The library community...is incredibly supportive and welcoming.”
Do you plan on continuing your career in art libraries?

- Yes (79%)
- Undecided (16%)
- No (2%)
“I think being an art librarian is the best job in the world, we certainly don’t do it for the money.”

“I would like to continue in this career path but due to lack of jobs in this specific area it seems unlikely.”
RESULTS: CONTRIBUTORS TO EMPLOYMENT

- Experience
- Background in the Arts (200)
- Networking
- Willingness to Relocate
- Other

Frequency
“Be prepared to move for your first professional post--once you’ve got that experience you stand a much better chance of getting jobs you really want.”

“Networking might not secure you a job directly, but [it] will increase your confidence in the field.”
CONCLUSIONS

The “typical” art librarian

- Is employed in an academic setting
- Has a background in arts at undergrad or grad level
- Selected librarianship due to job duties/work setting

In general

- Sincere satisfaction with the profession—only a handful mentioned unappealing aspects such as low compensation and few positions being available
CONCLUSIONS: FURTHER RESEARCH

Fairly even distribution of art library professionals’ ages
- Generational shift taking place?
- Art libraries only, or all libraries?

Professionals’ thoughts on the future of the field
- Increased specialization vs. broad based knowledge frequently mentioned in responses
CONCLUSIONS: FURTHER QUESTIONS

How might the profession change?

- What changes might we see in coming years in relation to professionals’ backgrounds and values?
- Will we see core values shift as the political landscape continues to change?
Recruiting new professionals

- What advice do professionals have to offer those interested in the field?
- What do graduate students wish they could share with those already active in the profession?
RECOMMENDED SOURCES


Roberto C. Ferrari, “To PhD, or Not to PhD: A Question for Art Librarians,” *Art Documentation* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 51-55.

THANK YOU!

EAMON.TEWELL@LIU.EDU
@EAMONTEWELL