Non-MLS Reference Salaries in Academic Libraries Lag Behind Peers:
Non-MLS Salaries Closing Fast on MLS Salaries

By Jennifer French

Library staff who help patrons have a great impact on public perception of the library. The positions of associate librarian, technical assistant, clerks, and various other non-MLS staff are vital to several library services (see grey box for position definitions). Many libraries, including academic libraries, use non-MLS staff to support reference areas. At every position level, non-MLS reference staff help patrons with questions and conduct searches, according to the ALA-APA Non-MLS Salary Survey. Their direct contact with the public puts them in a liaison position between patrons and library services. They may be a patron's first or only contact with library staff. Despite the training and knowledge needed to properly assist in a reference area, many non-MLS reference positions in academic libraries earn less than their peers in others areas (e.g. Cataloging, Adult Services, etc.)
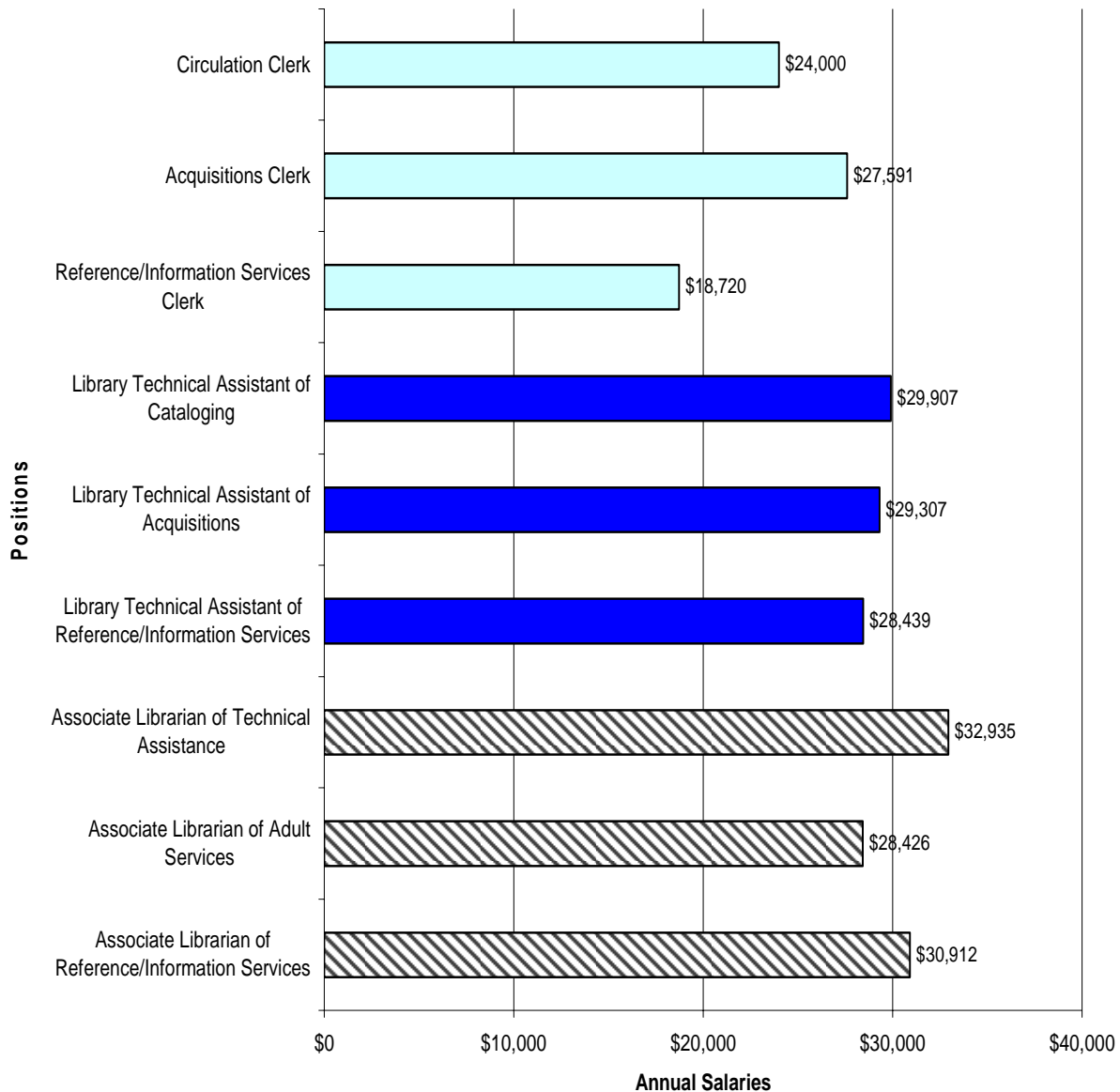
The ALA-APA Non-MLS Salary Survey is ALA's first attempt to collect salary information for all non-MLS staff not included in the ALA Survey of Librarian Salaries. The survey asked participating academic and public libraries for salary information for an overwhelming 62 positions, 16 of which had more than 100 salaries reported (see Table 1). Of these 10 were in the Public Services category and all three reference positions in the survey were in this group.

Table 1.   Non-MLS Positions in Academic Libraries by Positions Reporting

Position	Category	Number of Positions (N)
Circulation Clerk	Public Services	557
Library Technical Assistant of Reference/Information Services	Public Services	331
Library Technical Assistant of Acquisitions	Public Services	283
Inter-Library Loan Assistant	Technical Services	256
Copy Cataloger	Technical Services	236
Library Technical Assistant of Cataloging	Public Services	197
Shelver/Page	Public Services	195
Serials Processing Assistant	Technical Services	192
Administrative Assistant	General Administration	173
Associate Librarian of Adult Services	Public Services	133
Acquisitions Clerk	Public Services	125
Systems Administrator	Technical Services	122
Processing Assistant	Technical Services	117
Reference/Information Services Clerk	Public Services	111
Associate Librarian of Technical Assistance	Public Services	103
Associate Librarian of Reference/Information Services	Public Services	101

When compared to similar positions in this group, Reference/Information Services Clerks and Library Technical Assistants of Reference/Information Services typically earned a salary lower than their peers (see Chart 1).

Chart 1. Median Non-MLS Salaries for Positions in Academic Libraries, 2006

Position	Salary
Circulation Clerk	$24,000
Acquisitions Clerk	$27,591
Reference/Information Services Clerk	$18,720
Library Technical Assistant of Cataloging	$29,907
Library Technical Assistant of Acquisitions	$29,307
Library Technical Assistant of Reference/Information Services	$28,439
Associate Librarian of Technical Assistance	$32,935
Associate Librarian of Adult Services	$28,426
Associate Librarian of Reference/Information Services	$30,912

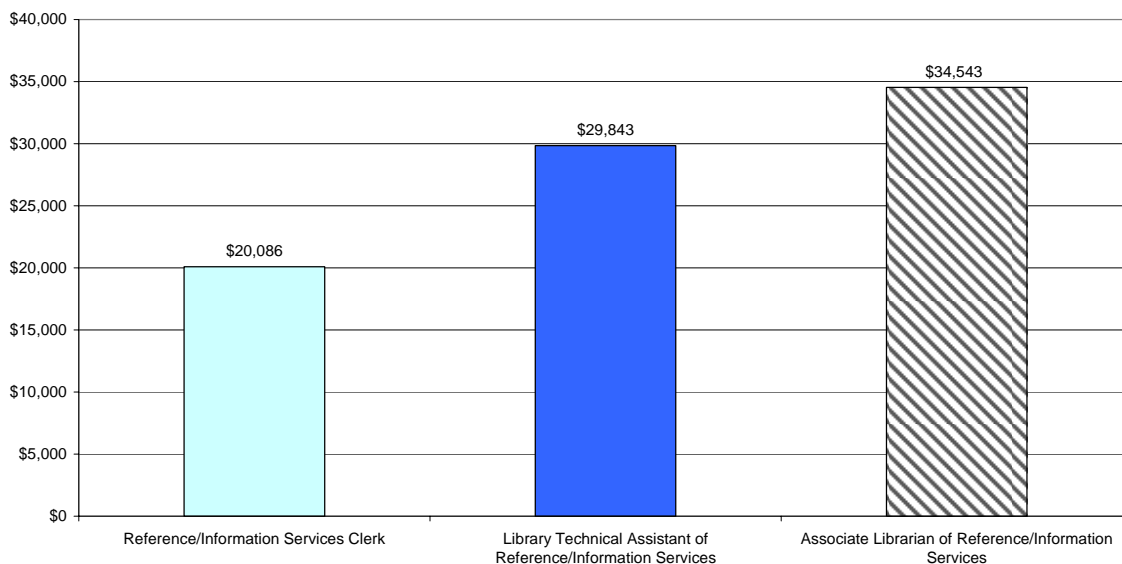Positions (y-axis), Annual Salaries (x-axis: $0, $10,000, $20,000, $30,000, $40,000)

The median salary for Reference/Information Services Clerks was $5,280 less than for Circulation Clerks and $8,871 less than for Acquisitions Clerks. Typically Library Technical Assistants of Reference/Information Services earned $868 to $1,468 less than those in Acquisitions and Cataloging. Assistant Librarians of Reference/Information Services. On the other hand, typically earned $2,486 more than Associate Librarians of Adult Services, but they earned $2,023 less than Associate Librarians of Technical Assistance.

Another interesting observation about the salaries for reference positions is the disproportional pay difference between position levels. Library Technical Assistants average annual salary was $9,757 more than Clerks. This would be a pay increase of 49 percent for staff who were promoted from a clerk position to library technical assistant. There is only a 14 percent increase from a Library Technical Assistant position to Associate Librarian (or a difference of $4,700).

Chart 2. Average Annual Salaries for Non-MLS Reference Positions in Academic Libraries, 2006

	$40,000		
			$34,543
		$29,843	
$20,086			

Reference/Information Services Clerk — $20,086
Library Technical Assistant of Reference/Information Services — $29,843
Associate Librarian of Reference/Information Services — $34,543

Non-MLS reference staff have a large impact on a library user's perception of a library and can often influence future visits. Considering the importance of maintaining well trained and experienced staff to assist patrons, it is surprising that non-MLS reference positions are not compensated as well as their peers in circulation, interlibrary loan and technical services.

Upon further investigation, the ALA Non-MLS survey results show that in academic libraries the salaries of Associate Librarians are catching up to the salaries of Beginning Libraries as reported in the ALA MLS survey (see Chart 3). The average salary for all types of Associate Librarians in academic libraries is $34,461 and the average for Beginning Librarians is $42,186. Therefore, Associate Librarians (non-MLS) earn only $7,545 less than Beginning Librarians (MLS). This is a smaller difference than the one between Beginning Librarians and Librarians Who Do Not Supervise - that difference is $9,133. This indicates that the salaries of Associate Librarians in academic libraries are catching up to Beginning Librarians who are required to have a MLS. Also if the number of positions reported in the MLS and Non-MLS surveys is any indication, there are more Associate Librarians in academic libraries than Beginning Librarians. The ALA Non-MLS survey received salaries for 465 Associate Librarian positions while the ALA MLS survey received only 265 for Beginning Librarian positions.

FAST FACTS — RECENT STATISTICS FROM THE LIBRARY RESEARCH SERVICE

Chart 3. Non-MLS & MLS Salaries in Academic Libraries
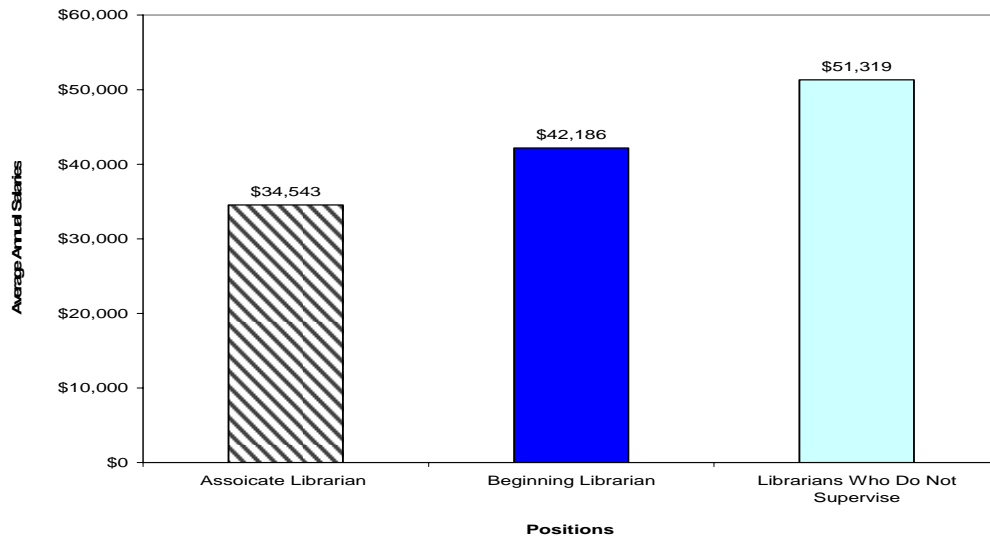
Based on the data, there appears a need in academic libraries to re-evaluate pay increases based on experience, required skill level or training, and educational requirements. What better way to insure quality services to fit the information needs of academic library patrons, than to recognize the importance of maintaining a well trained and experienced non-MLS and MLS staff through salary incentives?

Associate Librarian (non-MLS degreed) – Provides assistance to patrons including topical research and material location. Assists patrons with the use of library resources and equipment. Screens the collection for outdated or unused materials following established guidelines. May perform managerial and administrative duties.

Library Technical Assistant – Provides basic assistance to patrons referring patrons to Librarian for professional assistance. Locates materials and information for patrons. May complete routine copy cataloging. Assists with special programming.

Clerk – Performs routine duties requiring the use of a variety of forms, reports or procedures. Provides basic patron assistance: sets up computer stations, locates materials, provides information. Maintains department or area records. Performs miscellaneous clerical duties such as filling, typing, sorting or photocopying.

Sources:

Grady, J. & Davis, D. (2006). ALA-APA Non-MLS Salary Survey: A Survey of Library Positions Not Requiring an ALA-Accredited Mater's Degree. American Library Association – Allied Professional Association.

Grady, J. & Davis, D. (2006). ALA Survey of Librarian Salaries. American Library Association – Allied Professional Association.