

Is it Worth It? The Perceived Value of an MLIS Degree

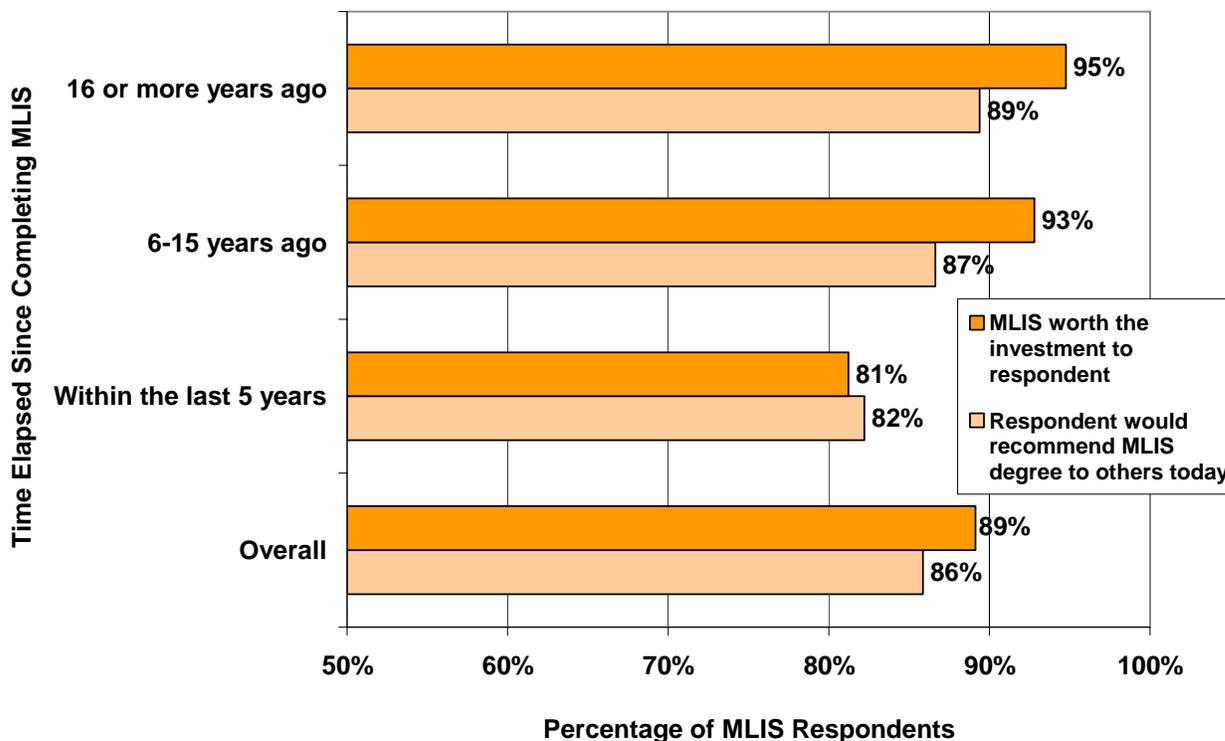
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Would you recommend getting an MLIS to a new graduate? This question, recently posed on libnet (a Colorado-based library listserv), prompted an immediate flurry of thoughtful responses. The number and intensity of the responses inspired us to launch the Library Research Service's inaugural 60-Second Survey, "The Value of an MLIS to You." Distributed primarily via listservs and blog posts, the survey response was tremendous. There were almost 2,000 responses, including respondents from each of the 50 states and 6 continents. But, the respondents didn't stop at just answering the questions. More than 1,000 of them left over 56,000 words worth of comments further explaining their thoughts and feelings about the value of a Master Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree. Clearly, librarians feel passionately about this topic.

In the style of the online reader poll (à la CNN), the survey was short and to the point. With a single purpose, to capture librarians' gut-reaction to "is an MLIS worth it," respondents were asked just seven questions, including the two key questions: 1) Do you feel your MLIS degree was/is worth the time and money invested in it? 2) If asked today, would you recommend pursuing an MLIS degree?

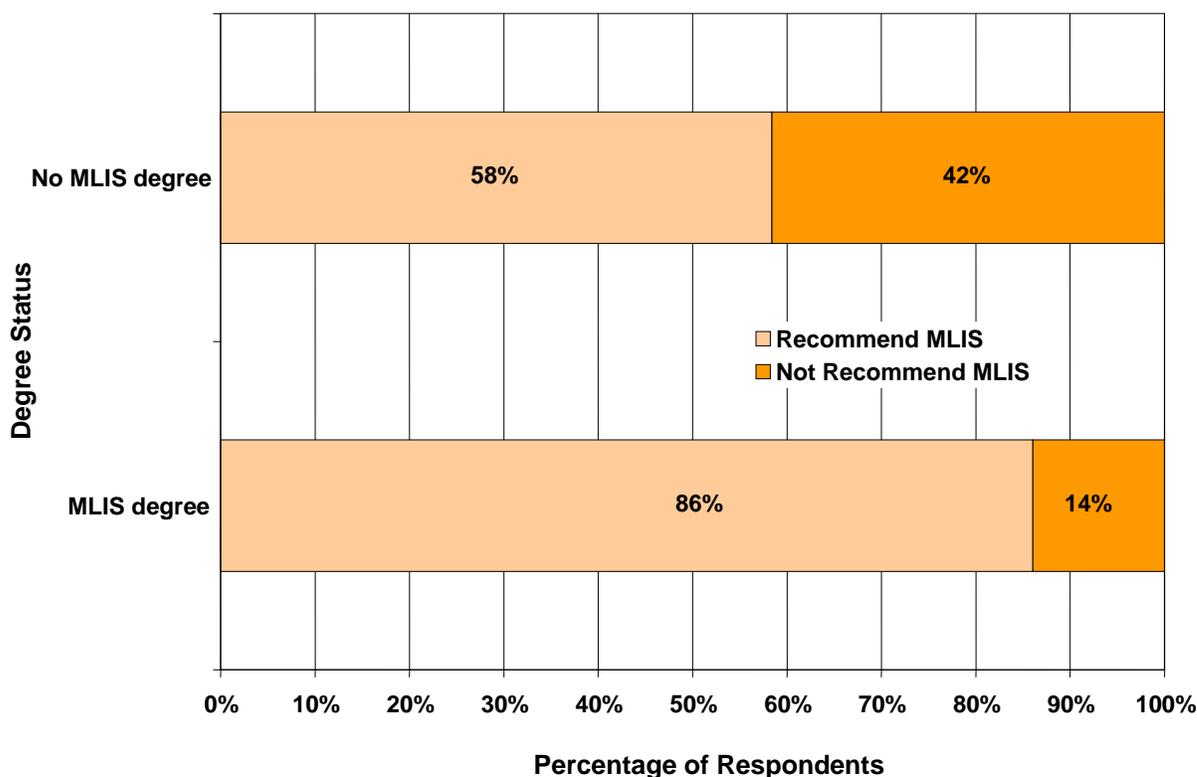
**Respondents' Perceptions of the Value of an MLIS Degree
By Years Since Earning Degree**



The survey found that overall, librarians are satisfied with their MLIS degree and would recommend it to others. Nine out of ten (89%) said they felt the degree was worth the time and money they invested in it. Only slightly fewer (86%) said they would recommend the degree to others. Perhaps not surprisingly, those who stay in librarianship are most apt to value their MLIS. An astonishing 95% of librarians that received their degree 16 or more years ago felt their degree was worth it. They were also the most likely to recommend the degree to others (89%). Those who graduated in the last five years were the least likely to feel their MLIS had value, with 81% indicating the degree was worth it and 82% indicating they would recommend it to others. Still, more than eight out of ten recent grads thought the MLIS worth the investment.

There are undoubtedly many reasons for this gap in the perceived value of the degree between MLIS graduates. Based on the comments, newly minted MLISers were concerned about job availability, adequate compensation, and paying off student loans. Whereas many of the respondents who had had their degree for a longer period of time commented that their MLIS was valuable in *their* career. However, they also expressed concern that the profession had changed considerably from when they were new MLIS recipients and they pondered the value of the degree, as well as the future of the librarianship in the age of Google. (For more on the comments see Fast Facts no. 270).

Percentage of Respondents That Would Recommend an MLIS Degree by MLIS Status



Non-MLIS respondents had a very different opinion about the value of a master of library science degree with only 58% saying it is worth the time and money invested in it. Given that they chose not to pursue an MLIS, this attitude seems quite logical. Many non-MLIS respondents commented that there was no financial or other benefit to getting an MLIS. Frequently these respondents said they were in a community or institution that did not pay more or promote staff based on MLIS status. In addition, some respondents didn't find value in the degree because they felt the work done in libraries could be done as well—or better—by paraprofessionals.

This survey was conceived with the intention of quickly measuring the opinions on the value of an MLIS degree. Because the respondents to this survey were a self-selected group, there is no way to generalize the results to apply to all librarians or the profession as a whole. In other words, this was not setup as a scientific study with a representative sample. Based on the distribution of people and library jobs in the United States, we received more responses from the West (38% of U.S. respondents) and Northeast (37%) than would be expected, and fewer from the Midwest (12%) and South (13%). However, there were no significant differences between regions in responses to most of the questions, and in particular to whether they would recommend the degree.



It seems clear that librarians find their MLIS degrees valuable and they would recommend the degree—and by implication the profession—to others. The overwhelming response to this quick survey suggests that there is room for further study into the value of an MLIS. There are larger issues, as well as subtleties, that need to be explored.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

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FAST FACTS

RECENT STATISTICS FROM THE LIBRARY RESEARCH SERVICE

Fast Facts – Recent Statistics from the Library Research Service

Colorado State Library • Colorado Department of Education

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