

Librarians: A study of supply and demand

Pioneering survey predicts market for the profession through 1990

by Nancy A. Van House, Nancy K. Roderer, and Michael D. Cooper

FOR THE REST OF THE 1980s, librarians in the "market" can look toward an improvement over the 1970s, but not a return to the boom of the 1960s. Librarians and jobs will be approximately balanced. There will be fewer jobs in school and academic libraries and more in public and special libraries. Most library jobs for new graduates will come from the need to replace people who leave the profession, not from the creation of new positions. Nonlibrary information professional positions, however, should employ many people with library-related education. The decline in the number of people receiving MLS degrees will end. Non-MLS library education programs will continue to contract. Librarians' real starting salaries (corrected for inflation) will increase modestly, reversing their decline of the late 1970s.

These are among the major findings of the *Library Human Resources Study* described at right. During the 1950s and 1960s, the library profession suffered from a shortage of qualified people. In the early 1970s the situation reversed dramatically. There was an apparent surplus of librarians, which has continued despite a marked reduction in the number of library degrees awarded each year. The basic question addressed by the study was: What is the future supply-demand situation for employment in the library profession?

New data gathered

In answering this question, the *Library Human Resources Study* created for the first time a comprehensive portrait of the library profession. Surprisingly, no single, consistent set of data on libraries and librarians existed prior to this study. This project consolidated existing information;

Nancy A. Van House is assistant professor, School of Library and Information Studies, University of California, Berkeley; **Nancy K. Roderer** is vice president, King Research, Inc., Rockville, Md.; **Michael D. Cooper** is associate professor, SLIS, UC, Berkeley.

About the study

Library Human Resources: a Study of Supply and Demand was sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics and the Office of Libraries and Learning Technologies of the Department of Education and was performed by King Research, Inc.

The study compiled existing data on the library labor market and surveyed libraries and library schools. An employer survey went to a stratified random sample of 2,335 public, academic, and special libraries and school districts. Response rates were 74 percent for public libraries, 79 percent for academic, 82 percent for special, and 64 percent for school districts (individual school libraries were not surveyed). The employer survey collected information on numbers of employees over the last five years; educational attainment and sex of currently-employed librarians; and previous and subsequent employment status of both newly hired

and terminated librarians.

A library school survey went to the universe of 275 accredited and nonaccredited library education programs at all levels (as many as could be identified from every possible source). The survey asked about numbers of recent graduates and their employment status after graduation. Response rate was 64 percent.

The principal investigator for King Research was Nancy K. Roderer. Nancy A. Van House and Michael D. Cooper of the University of California, Berkeley, also played major roles in the study. Jack Rutner of Joel Popkin and Associates provided statistical consulting. Helen Eckard of NCES was the project officer.

The final report of the project will be available in July from the Order Dept., ALA, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611, at a cost of \$20 (0-8389-0394-0).

collected additional data from library employers and library education programs of all types; explored the causes of changes in librarian supply and demand; and forecast the future library labor market.

The current situation

In 1982, about 139,000 librarians were

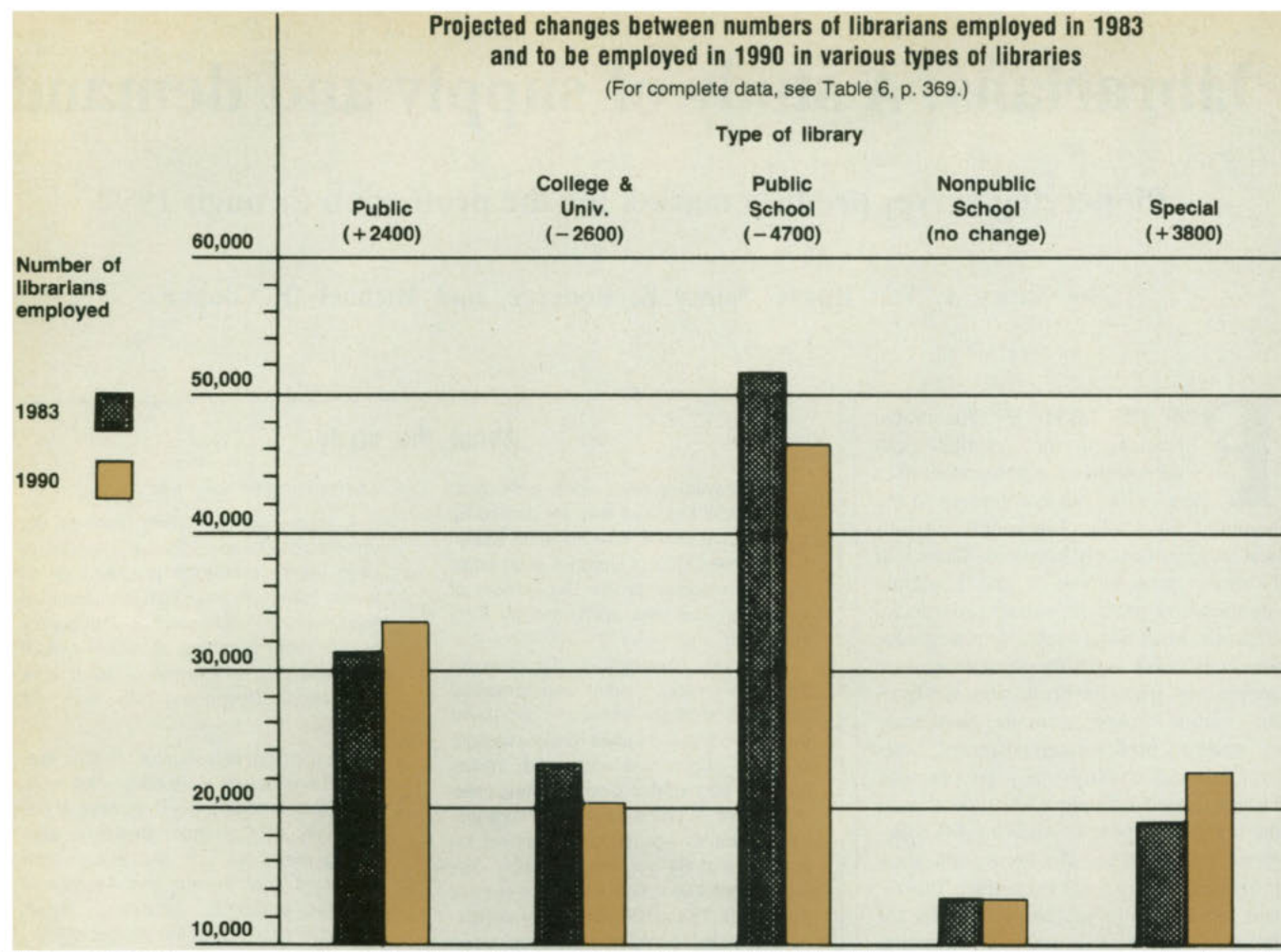
employed in 136,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) positions in nearly 44,000 public, academic, and special libraries and school districts. Almost half—48 percent—were employed in school libraries. Public libraries were the next largest employer with 23 percent. Academic libraries accounted for 15 percent; special libraries, 14 percent.

Professional librarians (Table 1) account

Table 1: U.S. library employment by type of library and staff category, 1982

Employee category	Library type				Total
	Public	Academic	School	Special	
Librarian	38%	35%	55%	37%	44%
Other professional	5	4	3	17	5
Support staff	57	61	42	45	50
Number of employees	82,150	60,290	117,750	47,410	307,600

Source: *Library Human Resources Study*



for about 44 percent of all people employed in libraries; their numbers range from 55 percent of those employed in school libraries to 35 percent in academic libraries. Although some observers have suggested that libraries are substituting nonprofessional staff for librarians, librarians

remained a fairly constant proportion of the staff in all types of libraries between 1978 and 1982.

Most libraries are quite small: the average library staff is only seven FTEs. The smallest are school libraries, averaging 4.7

FTEs; the largest, academic, averaging 20.4.

Eighty percent of employed librarians have some formal library degree or certificate: 60 percent an MLS (accredited or otherwise); 7 percent a school library certificate (and no MLS); and 12 percent a bachelor of library science (BLS) (Table 2). Academic librarians are the librarians most likely to have a formal library degree of some sort (95 percent), public librarians the least (70 percent). School librarians are the least likely to have the MLS (47 percent).

Women comprise 85 percent of those employed. School libraries employ the most women—91 percent. Ninety percent of special, 87 percent of public, and 65 percent of academic librarians are women.

Comings and goings

Overall, some 23,000 librarians were hired and about 17,000 left their jobs in 1981 (Table 3, next page). These figures represent people who entered or left the library profession or moved from one job to another within it. About 34 percent of those hired were new graduates, 44 percent

Table 2: Educational status of librarians by type of library, 1982

Educational status	Library Type				Total (n=139,870)
	Public (n=33,200)	Academic (n=21,200)	School (n=67,140)	Special (n=18,350)	
MLS degree	63%	89%	47%	73%	60%
4-year BLS	2	1	16	2	9
5th-year BLS	1	2	3	1	2
School library certificate	1	1	13	1	7
Other library degree or certificate	3	2	4	1	3
No library degree or certificate	27	5	16	21	18
Unknown	3	—	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100

were transfers from other libraries, and 22 percent came from other kinds of employment or were previously unemployed.

Following legal challenges to the MLS as an entry requirement, some libraries have instituted career ladders into the professional ranks for nonprofessional staff. Among librarians hired in 1981, however, only 6 percent had previously been employed as nonprofessionals in the same library. Some were probably MLS holders who took nonprofessional jobs, then moved into professional positions as they became available. Although some support staff are moving into librarian positions without formal training, this does not appear to be a major trend.

Among librarians leaving their jobs in 1981, 37 percent moved from one library to another. About three-quarters of these people stayed in the same type of library. Although in theory librarians can move around among types of libraries, in practice they generally don't. This may be because librarians prefer to stay with one type of library. Or it may be that the library labor market is actually several markets with permeable boundaries. Employers (and librarians) may perceive that librarians' skills are not transferable across

Table 3: Librarian turnover

Status	1981 hires from this status (n=23,010)	1981 separations to this status (n=17,250)
Academic programs		
MLS	16%	—
4-year BLS	4	—
School library certificate	7	—
Other academic programs	7	—
Subtotal: Academic programs	34	5
Library employment		
Public	7	9
Academic	7	16
School	16	4
Special	8	7
Library technical, clerical, other support staff	6	—
Subtotal: Library employment	44	37
Other		
Nonlibrary information professional	4	9
Other employment	9	6
Unemployed, actively seeking work	8	7
Died	—	5
Not employed and not seeking work	—	22
Unknown or other	1	9
Subtotal: Other	22	58
Total	100	100

The National Archives Announces Its New

Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives

Interest in genealogy and local history is growing rapidly. More than 20,000,000 individuals in the United States are now conducting research into the histories of their families and communities. In response, the National Archives—official keeper of more than 1.3 million cubic feet of federal records—has revised and substantially expanded its GUIDE TO GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES. Genealogists everywhere have been waiting eagerly for this edition, which expands and updates the 1964 GUIDE.

The 320-page GUIDE is an indispensable tool for both sophisticated and beginning researchers. It can help them make a systematic review and selection among the wide range of federal records important to genealogists and local historians:

- Census records
- Military service and pension files
- Ship passenger arrival lists
- Federal land records and many more . . .



The GUIDE includes references to more than 550 microfilm publications available from the National Archives. Numerous citations to secondary sources will also prove valuable to reference librarians in assisting their patrons to locate relevant materials. In addition, the GUIDE makes clear what records are not in the National Archives and frequently indicates where they might be found.

An essential addition to any genealogy or local history reference library.

Appendixes/Illustrations/Index
Hardcover \$21.00 Softcover \$17.00

Order from your wholesaler or send your purchase order to:

Genealogical Guide
Box 104
National Archives
Washington, DC 20408

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES: KEEPER OF THE AMERICAN HERITAGE

If librarians cannot move easily from one type of library to another, imbalances within the profession may occur. Surpluses and shortages may exist simultaneously when the experience of librarians available fails to match the jobs open.

library types. If librarians cannot move easily from one type of library to another, imbalances within the profession may occur. Surpluses and shortages may exist simultaneously when the experience of librarians available fails to match the jobs open.

Fifteen percent of all other librarians leaving their jobs in 1981 left libraries for other employment; 49 percent retired, died, returned to school, became unemployed, or simply left the labor force. People who leave libraries— 8 percent of all librarians employed during 1981—create openings for new librarians. Even if the total number of positions for librarians were to remain constant, some 13,000 new librarians would be needed each year to replace those who leave library institutions.

New graduates

In 1981, nearly 5,000 MLSs (accredited and nonaccredited), 300 BLSs, and 1,700 school library certificates (without other library degrees) were awarded. They were the products of nearly 300 educational programs, only 60 of which were ALA-accredited MLS programs.

The overwhelming majority of degree recipients continues to be women. The proportion of women receiving degrees ranges from 82 percent of MLSs to 94 percent of school library certificates.

The difficulty new graduates have in finding jobs is an indicator of the general health of the library labor market. Library placement rates among new graduates have remained stable during the last few years, despite the declining numbers of new graduates to be placed. In 1980-81, 77

percent of MLS graduates found professional jobs in libraries (Table 4, p. 368). In addition, about 4 percent went into each of the following categories: nonlibrary information professional positions; nonprofessional library positions; and other non-information-related employment. Nine percent were not employed (including those who went on with their schooling, left the labor force entirely, or sought work but did not find it). Graduates of other library programs did less well: 69 percent of BLS recipients found information-related jobs, as did 82 percent of those receiving school library certificates.

Even under the best of conditions, not all library program graduates seek information-related jobs. If 5 percent of all graduates choose not to seek jobs, but rather to continue their education, leave the labor force, or seek non-information-related jobs,¹ then about 14 percent of 1981

¹Data from the annual *Library Journal* survey of placements and salaries (the latest edition of which is: Carol L. Learmont and Stephen Van Houten, "Placement and Salaries 1981: Still Holding," *Library Journal* 107:17 (Oct. 1, 1982), pp. 1821-1827) indicate that even in the 1960s, when jobs were plentiful, about 5 percent of MLS graduates chose not to enter the library labor force.

DEWEY Decimal Classification®

Numbers You Can Count On!

DEWEY Decimal Classification and Relative Index. Edition 19. 1979.

Set: 3 Vols. ISBN 0-910608-23-7 \$100.00
 Purchasers of Edition 19 are entitled to receive FREE issues of *DC&* as released. Have you received *DC&*, Vol. 4, No. 3? If not, notify Forest Press. Vol. 4, Nos. 1 and 2 are also available.

Abridged DEWEY Decimal Classification and Relative Index. Edition 11. 1979.

ISBN 0-910608-22-9 \$27.00

Sistema de Clasificación Decimal. 1980.

Set: 3 Vols. ISBN 0-910608-26-1 \$75.00

Proposed Revision of 780 Music. 1980.

ISBN 0-910608-25-3 Paper \$5.00

Visit us at Booth #1521 at ALA
 PICK UP A FREE GIFT!

NOW AVAILABLE:

Manual on the Use of the DEWEY Decimal Classification: Edition 19. 1982.

ISBN 0-910608-32-6 Paper \$20.00
 Prepared by the Editors and staff of the Decimal Classification Division. Official guide to the application of Edition 19.

FORTHCOMING:

Melvil Dewey: The Man and the Classification. 1981 Seminar Proceedings.

ISBN 0-910608-34-2

Forest Press

85 Watervliet Ave.
 Albany, N.Y. 12206 U.S.A.
 (518) 489-8549

All prices plus postage and handling

graduates were unsuccessful in finding the kinds of jobs they wanted.

1981 MLS graduates were distributed almost equally across types of libraries, with slightly more in school and fewer in

Table 4: Placement of 1981 MLS graduates (accredited and nonaccredited) (n=4,355)

Position	Percent
Professional librarian	77
Nonlibrary information professional	4
Nonprofessional library	4
Other employment	4
Not employed	9
Unknown	2
Total	100

special libraries. The majority of school library certificate and BLS recipients—not surprisingly—went to work in school libraries. Over half the recent graduates hired by school libraries were from programs other than MLS programs.

It appears that certificate and BLS programs, which graduated 29 percent of new librarians in 1981, are supplying primarily the school library market and will be heavily affected by the strength of that market. MLS programs, because they supply all types of libraries, can better balance changes in their various markets.

Nonlibrary information professionals

A significant recent development has been the movement of librarians into nonlibrary information professional positions. Although little information exists about people with library education working in nonlibrary settings, some useful data comes from surveys of libraries and library schools. Among librarians changing jobs in 1981, about 9 percent, or 1,500, transferred to nonlibrary information professional positions. About 4 percent, or 1,000, professionals hired by libraries in 1981 came from nonlibrary information jobs. The result was a net transfer out of libraries to other settings. Among new MLS graduates, 4 percent, or 200, went into information-related jobs not in libraries.

With some caution, one can conclude that nonlibrary information professional work is a small but significant part of the market for librarians. Librarians with more

Even if the total number of positions for librarians were to remain constant, some 13,000 new librarians would be needed each year to replace those who leave the profession.

experience than new graduates are moving in this direction—a situation that may be due to any of a number of factors. Employed librarians have experience as well as education to offer a new employer, which may make them more competitive candidates. They may also be more willing than new graduates to venture into organizations other than libraries. Nonlibrary information work may enable the experienced librarian who wants to change careers to move into a new area without starting over completely.

Forecasting supply and demand

A major part of the *Library Human Resources Study* was forecasting librarian supply and demand. As everyone knows, forecasting is by nature an inexact science.

Lacking a crystal ball, the forecaster studies the past to discern future trends. Forecasts are only as good as the researcher's analyses of the past and assumptions about the future. Their effectiveness also depends on some continuity between past and present.

This project described mathematically the relationship between past social and economic developments and the library labor market. It based forecasts of the library market on forecasts of these other phenomena. In developing the forecasts, the study identified leading indicators that presage changes in the library labor market. The actual forecasts are based on assumptions about the future performance of these indicators—assumptions which may or may not prove true. More important, however, is that these indicators have

Table 5: Graduates of library education programs by type of program, with projections: 1978–1990

Year ¹	Type of Program				Total
	MLS (accredited)	MLS (nonaccredited)	BLS	School library certificate	
1978	5,500	1,180	420	2,380	9,480
1979	5,050	1,040	400	2,190	8,680
1980	4,510	780	370	1,980	7,640
1981	4,200	770	310	1,700	6,980
Projections					
1982	3,710	560	330	1,570	6,170
1983	3,700	560	290	1,440	5,990
1984	3,770	570	260	1,330	5,930
1985	3,860	580	240	1,230	5,910
1986	4,020	600	210	1,130	5,960
1987	4,180	630	190	1,040	6,040
1988	4,310	650	170	960	6,090
1989	4,450	670	160	880	6,160
1990	4,490	670	140	820	6,120
Percentage increases					
1978–1982	–33	–53	–21	–34	–35
1982–1986	8	7	–36	–28	–3
1986–1990	12	12	–33	–27	3

¹Year reflects end of academic year, e.g., 1978 is 1977–1978 academic year.

Source: *Library Human Resources Study*.

Table 6: Librarian employment in the United States by type of library, with projections: 1978-1990

Year	Type of Library					Total
	Public	College and university	Public school	Nonpublic school	Special	
1978	30,100	19,900	50,600	10,200	15,600	126,400
1979	29,900	20,400	51,100	10,700	17,100	130,000
1980	30,400	20,400	50,600	11,800	17,500	130,700
1981	30,700	20,400	49,200	12,000	17,700	130,000
1982	31,100	21,200	51,600	13,600	18,600	136,100
Projections						
1983	31,300	23,100	51,500	13,600	19,100	138,600
1984	31,100	22,700	51,200	13,600	19,600	138,200
1985	31,300	22,400	50,400	13,600	20,200	137,900
1986	31,800	22,100	48,500	13,600	20,700	136,700
1987	32,400	21,700	47,600	13,600	21,200	136,500
1988	33,000	21,200	47,400	13,600	22,800	137,000
1989	33,500	20,700	46,800	13,600	22,400	137,000
1990	33,700	20,500	46,800	13,600	22,900	137,500
Percentage increases						
1978-1982	3	2	2	33	20	8
1982-1986	2	4	-6	-	12	*
1986-1990	6	-7	-4	-	11	1

*Less than 1 percent.

Source: *Library Human Resources Study*.

been identified. The library profession can now watch them for early warnings of market changes.

The supply of librarians at any future time consists of all librarians either employed at that time, or unemployed, but in the labor force. Added to this figure are new graduates who choose to seek information-related jobs, reentrants to the labor market, delayed entrants, and occupational transfers. Subtracted from the total are people who leave the profession due to death, retirement, withdrawal from the labor force, or occupational change.

Demand for new librarians comes from two sources: increases in the total number of jobs for librarians, and the need for replacements for those who leave. Forecasting the future of the library labor market, therefore, requires forecasts of

additions to the supply of librarians (primarily, but not exclusively, new graduates); changes in the number of librarian jobs; and the number of individuals leaving the library labor force.

Past supplies of new graduates proved to be primarily a function of librarians' starting salaries and of the total number of master's degrees awarded in all disciplines. The latter represents a propensity toward or the general availability of graduate education. Salary is a more complex matter. Many librarians insist that salary was not a major consideration in their career choice. They believe (probably correctly) that they could be earning more elsewhere, but that the rewards of library work compensate, to some extent, for relatively low salaries. The lower salaries are, however, the fewer people there are

willing to make the trade-off. Lower starting salaries, therefore, mean fewer new library school graduates.

Starting salaries for new graduates were found to depend on other professional women's salaries, expenditures on libraries, and past numbers of library school graduates. Higher expenditures on libraries and raises in comparable professional women's salaries tend to raise librarian salaries; larger numbers of graduates create a buyer's market and lower starting salaries. Assuming that both expenditures on libraries and professional women's salaries will increase modestly through the 1980s, and given the decline in the number of library school graduates during the 1970s, librarian starting salaries will increase slightly during the 1980s, thus reversing the salary decline of the 1970s. Higher salaries will cause the number of MLSs to increase (Table 5). Since BLSs and school library certificates are expected to decline, however, there will be a relatively constant total number of library program graduates.

The number of librarians employed was found to be a function of the population to be served. Specifically, the number of librarians employed in public libraries was

Assuming that both expenditures on libraries and professional women's salaries will increase modestly through the 1980s . . . librarian starting salaries will increase slightly during the same period.

closely tied to total population and to school enrollment; in school and academic libraries, to enrollment. The U.S. Bureau of the Census, which projects population growth, has found that changing birth rates over the last decade or so have made its task difficult. Forecasts based on the bureau's intermediate projections, however, predict a one-percent-per-year increase in public librarian employment; a one-percent-per-year decline in public school librarian employment; and a slight but steady decline in academic librarian employment after 1983 (Table 6, p. 369).

Special librarians present a special case: their employment depends on conditions in the sectors employing them and is also related to research and development spending. Special librarian employment is expected to increase at about 4 percent per year after 1983.

Many more jobs will be created by people leaving the profession than by the creation of new jobs. Some 13,000 new librarians will be needed each year to replace those leaving the profession (Table 7).

The supply and demand forecasts indicate that the job market for librarians will continue to be weak. There will be a slight excess of supply of new graduates over demand, but the excess will not be as great as during the late 1970s.

Opportunities for librarians will continue to be limited in the 1980s. The employment growth of the 1960s will not be repeated. However, the market will not be as tight as it was during the early 1970s,

As employers and librarians recognize that librarians have skills valuable for managing information in a variety of settings, the number of librarians moving into nonlibrary information positions may grow rapidly.

when by all indications it was at its worst ever. Starting salaries should improve. However, if salaries are held down—perhaps by fiscal stringency in the public sector—an eventual shortage of librarians is likely.

Most libraries will employ about the same number of or slightly fewer librarians through the 1980s. They will not be able to renew and revive their staffs by hiring new people, except to replace those who retire or leave for other reasons. Libraries will have to rely to a large extent on the people they already have. An increase in staff development and continuing education may be needed to help existing staff adjust to changes in technology and in user needs. Such training would also compensate for ideas that would have come from new staff.

The decline in the number of MLS graduates is expected to end. MLS numbers will then rise, but will not return to 1970s levels. This is good news for most library educators. However, school library certificate and BLS programs will continue to decline, as will their primary market, school libraries.

All these conclusions apply to libraries. The nonlibrary information profession is a relatively unexplored market for people with library education, although a small but significant number of librarians are moving into that area. As employers and librarians themselves recognize that librarians have skills valuable for managing information in a variety of settings, the number of librarians moving into nonlibrary information positions may grow rapidly.

People who wish to be trained—not as librarians—but to work with information in other ways and in other settings, are potential consumers of library education. Although forecasts indicate the decline in the number of MLS graduates will end, many library educators are looking to the nonlibrary information world for other markets. If library schools are to remain alive and well, they need students and stimuli; each of these may come from the nonlibrary information profession. That profession may also provide librarians and library educators with a new perspective on librarianship as an information profession. □

Table 7: Librarian supply and demand

Years ¹	Annual job openings				Annual new supply			
	Total employment ²	Growth ³	Replacement ⁴	Total	Graduates ⁵	Other additions ⁶	Total	Other positions ⁷
1978–1982	130,600	2,400	12,800	15,200	7,400	9,000	16,400	1,200
1982–1986	137,500	1,300	13,100	14,400	5,700	9,200	14,900	500
1986–1990	136,900	–100	13,700	13,600	5,800	9,600	15,400	1,800

¹ Table data reflect annual averages for the years indicated. 1978–1982 data derived from NCES/OLLT *Library Human Resources Survey*, 1982. 1982–1986 and 1986–1990 projections developed by King Research, Inc.

² Total employment in public, academic, school and special libraries.

³ Job openings due to increase (or decrease) in employment.

⁴ Job openings due to death, retirement, occupational transfers, and others leaving the library labor force.

⁵ Library program graduates seeking to enter the labor force (95 percent of all graduates). Includes graduates of accredited and nonaccredited MLS, BLS, and school library certificate programs.

⁶ Other entrants into the library labor force. Includes re-entrants, delayed entrants, and occupational transfers.

⁷ Projected number of individuals available for other positions, including nonlibrary information professional positions.

Source: *Library Human Resources Study*.