

Uncle Albert Needs You! Individual Recruiting Efforts Are a Necessity and an Obligation

Lorraine J. Pellack

SUMMARY. The terms “recruiting” or “recruitment” are regularly used in two very different connotations: hiring (and retention) practices and also recruiting into the profession itself. This article will focus exclusively on recruiting to the profession. There has been a shortage of science librarians since the 1950s, or earlier, and yet the problem has still not been adequately resolved. While there is a general acknowledgement that something needs to be done, in many cases, practicing librarians seem to feel they only have impact in one particular area—encouraging library student assistants to pursue a library science degree. There are many other ways individual librarians can participate in recruiting, even on a very small scale. Recruiting need not be a daunting, time-consuming task. This article provides some radical ideas to get people thinking and acting in ways to improve the visibility and attractiveness of science librarianship as a profession . . . and not just by serving as a good role model for student assistants they may (or may not) supervise. doi:10.1300/J122v27n01_05 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address:

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INTRODUCTION

Librarianship is clearly experiencing a graying of the profession. The American Library Association has done a great job in recent years of publicizing this to attract more students into library schools, and a number of initiatives are going on at the national level to encourage more individuals to pursue librarianship as a profession. The shortage of science² librarians, however, is not a new phenomenon. There has been a shortage since the 1950s, or earlier, and yet the problem has still not been adequately resolved (Brown 1953, Brown 1988, Dewey 1985).

Science librarians are at a loss as to how to deal with recruiting beyond what library schools already do. There seems to be a “catch-22” where librarians are unwilling to step on the toes of library educators by suggesting that there might be a need for alternative recruiting methods when, in fact, most practicing librarians do not have a clue as to what recruiting methods are currently being employed. While there is a general acknowledgement that something needs to be done, in many cases, practicing librarians seem to feel they only have impact in one particular area—encouraging their student assistants to pursue a library science degree (Stoss 2005).

Contrary to popular opinion, student supervisors are *not* the only individuals in a position to recruit new blood into the profession. Every person who has a positive interaction with a librarian is a potential recruit and a walking advertisement for the profession. The late Lawrence Clark Powell (Chief Librarian at UCLA from 1944-1966 and founder of the UCLA School of Library Service) was a very passionate bibliophile and librarian who repeatedly went on the record espousing that every library staff member had an obligation to interest students in librarianship as a career:

There are riches to be found beneath the minimum wage; there are refreshments not served at the coffee break; there are rewards unseen by Recordak [brand name of a microfilm reader]. We who

have found them in library work must tell young people about them . . . (Powell 1958, p. 168-169)

In the good old days, it used to be much easier to recruit students if there was a nearby library school and individuals could commute or take courses part-time. Many of the students were working full-time and librarianship was not their first career choice. Library schools, such as the one at UCLA, could attract a sufficient number of students by just recruiting locally (and many still can). With the advent of distance education and, more recently, web-based courses, this has geographically widened the net of possible students; however, it still requires that prospective students know about career possibilities and become interested in pursuing the degree.

WHO ARE WE?

Demographics are always fun to analyze and can be extremely useful. Newly-minted librarians, on the whole, are choosing librarianship as a second or third career in increasing numbers. In 1989, Heim and Moen (p. 44) reported that 30.2% of students surveyed chose to pursue their LIS degree after working in a non-library field. By 2005, Maatta (p. 30) found that 53% of recent library school graduates went to library school as a second or third career.

Science librarians, on the other hand, appear to have made up their minds about librarianship a lot earlier in life. Hackenberg & Chu (2002) surveyed sci-tech librarians and reported that 57% replied that they intended to become sci-tech librarians from the start, and 60% of the responding librarians had some type of science background before becoming sci-tech librarians. Winston (2001) surveyed sci-tech librarians in academic and research university libraries in the United States. He reported that only one-third of the librarians he surveyed had held professional or paraprofessional positions in the sciences or engineering prior to entering librarianship. Undergraduate majors for this group varied, but most often included biology, physics or chemistry. Only 8.9% had an additional master's degree in a science or engineering-related discipline.

WHAT MAKES THE PROFESSION ATTRACTIVE?

Librarians have speculated on this question for some time. The prevailing thought appears to be that the way to answer this question is to

poll various groups of current librarians to see why they chose the profession. Berry (2003b) reported results from an e-query of recent library school students asking, among other things, why they chose the profession. The findings were quite varied but contained a number of themes. Those who worked in libraries as support staff members loved the work and chose to pursue the professional degree as a form of job advancement. Others loved books and reading, had the desire to help people find information they need, or desired a career that serves the needs of both individuals and society. Hallmark and Lembo (2003) surveyed science librarians to find out why they switched from science to LIS. One-fourth of the respondents had become disillusioned or dissatisfied with their science career due to reasons such as industry layoffs, limited career opportunities in sciences without a PhD, wanted more regular hours, etc. The other three-fourths were drawn to LIS due to “their love of the scientific and technical literature as well as the fun and challenge of information research.” What a powerful concept!

Sheehy (2000) is one of the few to focus almost exclusively on the unseen benefits of library work as an essential tool in recruiting. She was not targeting her comments specifically to any particular segment of the library profession, but at librarianship in general. She very eloquently describes the intangible plusses of library work as: cooperation and congeniality, opportunity to make a difference, intellectual stimulation and life-long learning, variety, and job security. The very fact that she feels these benefits are “unseen” and “intangible” is interesting in and of itself. Clearly, these are benefits that need to be promoted more.

Why someone chooses a profession is not necessarily the same thing as what makes the profession attractive. Given the variety of job duties in a particular library it may be difficult to generalize about what makes the profession attractive (e.g., what may be attractive to a cataloger might not be attractive to a reference librarian and vice versa); however, job attractiveness is a key element in recruiting and something that each of us needs to think about prior to talking to a potential recruit. If you cannot describe the profession, or at least your own job, in a way that makes someone eager to jump on board, then they are not likely to do so.

RECENT RECRUITING ACTIVITIES

There have been a number of recent articles in library science journals addressing a predicted librarian shortage in the United States. (See St. Lifer 2000 for a general overview and Wilder 2000 for research

libraries.) This, in turn, has sparked a number of recruiting initiatives at the national level. In 2001, the American Library Association began a multi-year public education program called “@ your library, The Campaign for America’s Libraries.” During 2003, this program featured the “Academic and Research Library Campaign”—an element of which was to showcase academic and research librarianship as a “desirable career opportunity.” In 2003, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) began a new grant program, *Recruiting and Educating Librarians for the 21st Century*, designed specifically at bringing more individuals into librarianship. The vast majority of the individual IMLS grants in this program have been aimed at recruiting ethnic minorities, but there are also a couple of other unique groups being targeted such as rural librarians and science librarians. Unfortunately, none of these programs to date have published information on any sort of unique process they went through to recruit a specific target group. Chemistry librarians have been very active in promoting science librarianship (Barnett 2005, Silverman 1993). There have also been association efforts to promote academic and science librarianship (Association of College & Research Libraries 2003, Association of Research Libraries 2004) as well as a few individual, lower-visibility efforts (See Kreeger 2004, Pellack 2004, Stoss 2005).

In reading through the literature and talking to colleagues on listservs, it is difficult to tell exactly what recruiting methods are being employed by individual library schools. Clearly the higher-ranking library schools don’t need to do *any* recruiting to fill their incoming classes; however, very few of them appear to be going on record as to exactly how much, or what sort of, recruitment is being done. Garoogian (1981), of the Pratt Institute, in discussing the historical recruitment efforts by library schools said “[a]s a matter of fact, the schools have played a very small role in seeking and tempting excellent candidates, those with special qualities, into the profession.” She goes on to suggest library schools take a more active role in marketing and advertising. Dewey (1985), then Director of Admissions and Placement at Indiana University SLIS, made several suggestions for changes in recruitment strategies for library schools. Most of the suggestions focused on keeping librarians up-to-date on things to tell potential recruits. “Library schools can help to correct erroneous perceptions about their activities by sending pertinent materials to librarians about current programs and trends and by attending professional meetings to discuss issues concerning current library education topics.” Berry (2003b) reported information he gathered in talks with several library school deans and directors about their recruiting efforts

and actually mentions a number of them specifically. Unfortunately, the majority of comments focused on the impact of their website as their main recruiting tool, with only a few “targeted efforts” beyond their website. They are, quite correctly, presuming that once individuals become interested in librarianship they will visit a particular website in order to find more details; however, few efforts appear to be aimed at catching the attention of those who have not yet discovered an interest in librarianship.

RECRUITING UNTAPPED STUDENTS

A number of librarians highly recommend starting to recruit at a much earlier age. For example, Robles (1998) recommends regular contact at elementary and secondary grade levels since many minority students may not graduate from high school otherwise. Hauge (1997) also lists things school librarians can do to help recruit future librarians. While this will clearly be difficult for science librarians to carry out at the school library level, it speaks to the need for getting to know nearby school librarians and informing them of career options that they can in turn pass along to their students. Recruiting at the undergraduate level has also been emphasized quite a bit. Lucker (1998) recommends recruiting among high school and undergraduate students. Vazakas and Wallin (1992) considered undergraduate students to be a largely untapped group and a good target for recruiting science librarians as did Stuart and Drake (1992). Berry (2003b) also chimed in validating undergraduate students as “the best place” for recruiting librarians. Other, more controversial, suggestions have included: hiring people with subject specific PhDs instead of an MLS (Berry 2003a) and interesting librarians with non-science backgrounds to switch and learn science areas (see Hackenberg and Chu 2002; Morris-Knowler 2001; Stuart and Drake 1991). Regardless of which opinions you have about “best recruits” there are clearly a number of possibilities to draw from.

One of the most common themes coming out of the library literature is that the single most effective way to recruit library school students is by serving as a role model for students you supervise. This has been particularly successful for student assistants on campuses with a library school. Unfortunately, this is only a *small percentage* of the available pool of student assistants! There are many more colleges and universities without a library school that hire student assistants to work in their libraries, who may be science majors. Consider the other students at

these same colleges and universities who may not choose to work in the library but might consider librarianship as a profession if they had a little encouragement. Or, science majors who discover close to graduation that job duties in their discipline are not what they expected. Or, the scientific corporations who may have researchers that are unhappy with their lack of job security, are tired of spending their entire day in a lab, or dislike the intense competitiveness of their field. Or, teachers who are burned out by classroom stress and might want another career that allows them to help students succeed. There appears to be a wealth of untapped prospective library school students.

EACH ONE REACH ONE

In July 1988, the ALA Office of Library Personnel Resources sponsored a preconference entitled *Each One Reach One: Recruiting for the Profession* at the ALA conference in New Orleans. The title was intended to stress the importance of individual librarian efforts. The objectives were: “to convey the library profession as an interesting, dynamic career choice, provide recruitment strategies, and develop a national recruitment plan” (Matarazzo 1989). A handbook was distributed to participants at the preconference. Additions were made to the handbook based on comments from the preconference and it was reissued in 1989 as *Each One Reach One: Recruiting for the Profession Action Handbook*. The intent of the publication was to give librarians some practical tips on recruitment, and the organizers put together a phenomenal collection of ideas ranging from small individual efforts to much larger projects and publicity campaigns. James Matarazzo, who attended the preconference and relayed the information to Special Libraries Association members in the form of an article in *Special Libraries*, reported that the preconference was attended by more than 200 people and the meeting “resembled a rally convened to convince those who teach, those who practice, and those who manage professional associations there is a need to bring more students into the interesting and dynamic library profession. It was difficult to determine whether those at the preconference actually had the necessary zeal to recruit more students” (Matarazzo 1989). He concludes by saying “[t]he result is likely to be little action and little by way of acknowledging the problems of a much-needed national recruitment effort.” Nowhere in his report does he emphasize the concept of individual librarian efforts even though that appears to have been the intent of the preconference. As with many

similar campaigns, it can be difficult to gauge the effectiveness or impact on either individuals or the profession; however, the “Each One Reach One” concept could become extremely powerful if *individual* librarians put forth even a small amount of effort by initiating some of the suggestions mentioned in the handbook. “Each one of us can reach at least one other person ... we can do this in a personal manner that is respectful of our own personality preferences and demonstrates an interest in others. We are our own best recruiters” (Eschavarria 2001, p. 20).

IDEAS FOR RECRUITING SCIENCE LIBRARIANS

There are two noteworthy journal articles that do a very good job of providing ideas for recruiting science librarians. Vazakas and Wallin (1992) unfortunately appear to have slipped into the literature without much notice. Even though their article appeared in a prominent publication, and contains a number of useful suggestions, they have rarely been cited. They were among the first to advocate that individual science librarians could help combat shortages in the profession. In addition, they recommended reaching out to find potential recruits working outside the library field, an idea that very few others have even attempted to address. Hallmark and Lembo (2003) also present a number of talking points for successfully recruiting science and engineering students into library science. The following suggestions are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to stimulate additional thoughts. The list contains ideas taken from a variety of sources, as noted, as well as a few new ones:

- Have bookmarks about library careers available at the Circulation Desk (Each One Reach One 1989).
- Use library instruction sessions to tout librarianship as a career (Bosseau and Martin 1995; Stuart and Drake 1992; Each One Reach One 1989).
- Sponsor a seminar specifically on Careers in Information Science—inviting the entire campus community (Lauer 1984). This could easily be modified to be a seminar for science and engineering careers that includes librarianship as an option.
- Educate undergraduate advisers and career counselors in colleges of science and engineering to convince them to include LIS as an option for their graduates (Hallmark and Lembo 2003).

- Become student advisors—a logical part of advising would be to encourage interested students to consider librarianship (Studdard 2000).
- Participate in career days events at nearby high schools, colleges and universities (Bosseau and Martin 1995; Each One Reach One 1989).
- Volunteer to be a speaker for student clubs (Bosseau and Martin 1995; Each One Reach One 1989). This could be to talk about information careers or to feature cool new things in local library-land while slipping information on careers into the talk.
- Distribute a flyer or brochure about library careers in campus student mailboxes (Each One Reach One 1989) or wherever you work. Suggest that you can combine any college major with librarianship.
- Publicize distance education opportunities to allow getting a degree while working. Ideal for those seeking a second career.
- Branch out from traditional settings to capture the attention of potential library school students (Perry 2004). For science librarians, it means finding ways to alert scientists in commerce and industry to alternative careers—particularly in glutted fields—e.g., physics was glutted in the 1980s.
- Create an eye-catching career poster to put up in labs or staff/student lounges. There are also some posters and brochures available from professional associations such as SLA or ACRL—visit their websites or contact them to find out what they currently have available for promoting sci-tech library careers.
- Target areas that are known to have scientists leaving the field (see Preston 2004, introduction and pp. 111-138 for recent information on fields and reasons scientists are leaving).
- Jazz up the information and target specific groups. E.g., Engineers—tired of projects as lone ranger? Chemistry, Physics & Microbiology—get out of the isolation lab and into research? Physical Therapists—if arthritic thumbs are a problem, bring your hands and knowledge to the library profession. Tired of being isolated in a lab breathing noxious fumes? Put a breath of fresh air into your job by joining the library profession.
- Add Science and Engineering Librarianship to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* or find ways to alert career counselors in high schools and colleges to careers in science librarianship—in both academic and special libraries—at local, state or national levels.
- Encourage students enrolled in MLS/MLIS programs to consider academic librarianship (Hewitt, Moran and Marsh 2003) or science

librarianship. This works best on campuses with a library school, but also works to advantage with personal acquaintances, student assistants or library patrons, who are attending library school via distance education programs. Few incoming library science students actually know what kind of library they want to work in post-graduation.

- Volunteer to be a guest speaker for science reference courses taught through distance education programs and use the opportunity to encourage LIS students to become science librarians. Many library science programs such as SUNY-Buffalo offer opportunities for their students to chat online with a practicing librarian as a guest speaker for course units.
- Hire LIS students with science and engineering backgrounds as graduate assistants to help fund their library school, and give them nifty science-related projects to work on (Hallmark and Lembo 2003). You could offer through a particular library school nearby or through distance education. Make contact with potential library school programs and find out the possibilities. This may be difficult to budget but it really gives back to the profession.
- Investigate the possibility of providing an internship for academic credit. These can be paid or unpaid, full-time or part-time, work experiences for students considering a particular career. The work experience does not necessarily need to be on the campus of that particular college or university—it could occur in *any* library. This sort of program is usually offered through the career center at colleges and universities and options vary at each educational institution.

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

In 1956, Nesbitt said library schools had failed in two ways: “We have not produced the kind of recruiting literature that will appeal to young people, and we have not given vocational guidance counselors an adequate picture of the library profession.” Is this still true today? Stop and think about how you, personally, found out about what it takes to be a librarian—not how you found out about the *career*, but where you learned about what degree it takes, what schools offer the program, future job market, etc. Did you look it up in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)*? Or, did you find out about it by talking to a high school career counselor, college career counselor, teacher, library supervisor, personal acquaintance who was in library school, library

school brochures/website, or newspaper article? Chances are fairly good that even if you looked up the facts on a website or the *OOH*, you probably still talked to an enthusiastic individual about it somewhere along the way. I recently polled 50 academic librarians (including a wide mixture of science, social sciences, cataloging, reference, geographic locations in the U.S., and years in the profession) very informally by e-mail and asked this question. Of the forty who responded, thirty-seven of them had talked with an influential individual. Four of those individuals were guidance counselors but the other thirty-three were librarians. Seven of them had started with a guidance counselor and then talked with a librarian or two to get more details about the profession. There were no correlations between the number of years in the profession and where they received their information. Those who had talked with a guidance counselor or took a career test ranged from newly-minted librarians to those who had been in the profession for 20-30 years. Even though fewer came into the profession by solely talking with a guidance counselor, clearly it still pays to ensure they are knowledgeable about options for those who might be interested in librarianship as a profession. Go visit with vocational guidance counselors at nearby high schools and colleges—don't just call or send an e-mail—actually take the time to go meet them and become acquainted with their methods and tools. Take along some career brochures from professional associations and URLs for relevant websites that you can leave with the counselors. Take time to get to know nearby high school and public librarians. Give them your contact information in case they have questions or a prospective student wants to chat about science librarianship.

Recruiting requires up-to-date knowledge of library schools, admission requirements, etc., or knowledge of where recruits should look for that information. Garoogian (1981) noted that many library schools were changing their programs from a one-year degree program to a two-year program. Anyone who graduated from library school prior to this time may be unaware of this change and could be giving potentially incorrect information to interested enquirers. Giving out old information will not help the recruiting effort. Practicing librarians need to make it a point to keep abreast of changes in these areas in order to give accurate vocational guidance.

Holt and Strock (2005) also caution that it only takes a couple of years to turn out numerous, fresh MLS holders but it may be several years before the profession begins to see large numbers of those anticipated retirements. When recruiting, we need to be careful to alert prospective

students to the cyclical nature of job openings and suggest that they may need to take a general library position and watch for science librarian openings. (Not to mention that it's good experience to learn interdisciplinary areas.)

ENTHUSIASM AND TIME

There are many ways that individual practicing librarians can become active in recruiting, but it first requires a belief or interest in doing something and, secondly, it requires a genuine enthusiasm for the job. "The most important thing we can share with others is our own enthusiasm for our profession" (Eschavarria 2001, p. 19). Few people outside the profession have any idea what a librarian does all day besides read books. The job is considerably more intellectually stimulating than outsiders suppose and we need to find ways to inform recruits of the fallacies inherent in the stereotypic librarian as personified by the media. "Self-confident librarians who are enthusiastic about their work make others not only curious but perhaps a little covetous" (Allen 1956, p. 10). What happens when you encounter individuals *outside* of the workplace that ask what you do for a living? How animatedly do you answer this question? Do you just say you work for *x* university or company? Or, do you say you're a librarian and you get to do things you love doing all day? "When someone asks what you do, be prepared to describe something interesting about your work" (Each One Reach One, 1989, p. 2).

Enthusiasm can be invigorated (or reinvigorated) by reading inspiring books or revisiting success stories. Try reading texts such as Powell's *A Passion for Books*, Gorman's *Our Singular Strengths*, or very passionate articles such as one by Steven J. Bell (2003). Visit some websites that outline library impacts on patrons such as those from ALIA's *Library Stories*, the *Feel-Good Librarian* or *Science Librarian Success Stories* (Pellack 2006). All serve as excellent reminders, to both librarians and prospective students, of the value of libraries and librarians.

Time is a precious commodity that always seems to be in short supply but we always manage to find time for things that are important to us. Recruiting for the profession does not require taking time aside from other activities unless you choose to do so. True, I sit writing this on a Saturday afternoon in the middle of a winter snowstorm, choosing to spend time on writing while ignoring the dirty laundry piles—but it

illustrates the point nicely. Recruiting can be done as part of everyday tasks, whether at work, at home, or socially. It does not matter whether it's a little or a lot, but it does require a conscious decision to do something, anything.

CONCLUSION

Lucile Allen (1956, p. 9) was one of the first to suggest that “personal contact, whether on a social or professional basis, is one of the best ways of building recruitment programs.” This still remains true today. Practicing librarians are, individually and collectively, the best advertisement for the profession. “Make more people aware of your existence and you provide a choice for those who would not have been aware of the field as a potential source of a career” (Garoojian 1981, p. 88). Librarians who work in public areas have the opportunity to interact with numerous potential librarians every time they answer a query. Librarians who work in non-public areas may not think they have as much contact with potential recruits but they still interact with a variety of people and have many of the other opportunities, mentioned above, to influence prospective students. With apologies to Powell, who was very book-centric, I have taken the liberty of broadening out and modernizing his original comments (1958, p. 184) by replacing his use of the word “books” with “information”:

Human values and human judgments are inseparable from good librarianship . . . salaries and certification, the classification of jobs, and the co-ordination of [library school] curricula, are all important, and must be dealt with, but beneath these complexities lie the great simplicities of humane librarianship—that information is basic, that people are good, and that bringing the two together, so that information is made more useful and people more fruitful, is one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences on earth. It is called librarianship.

It makes my emotions soar and reaffirms my professional being every time I think about it. You too can experience the satisfaction of having an impact—not just on library patrons—but also on the profession. Each of us should ask ourselves the question: What have I done recently to ensure science librarians do not become an extinct species?

NOTES

1. Uncle Albert is a popular nickname among scientists for Albert Einstein. He was a very outspoken pacifist and political activist well-known for his radical ideas.

2. The term “science” is used throughout the article for the sake of simplicity, but it could easily be swapped with a number of other words describing specific types of librarians—engineering, medical, academic, etc.

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